

Land and ancient ways in dire peril

RECENTLY we had the privilege of visiting North Head community and their unique land and coastline at the Dampier Peninsular.

We travelled from Middle Lagoon to Gnylmarung via North Head and were amazed at the diversity of the flora and fauna. Turtles, whales, dugongs, crocodiles, sharks, reef fish, wallabies, lizards and snakes are frequently seen on this part of the peninsular.

We were also able to see the communities where children learn traditional ways of hunting, language and law. These children would not have the right to learn their own culture if dispossessed from the land that their ancestors have inhabited for thousands of years.

We were horrified that this community and its surrounds are to be obliterated to make way for the development of a large-scale LNG hub by Woodside.

Imagine if this proposal were to happen in a place where white people had lived and gained spiritual and cultural meaning.

The site Colin Barnett has proposed as his favoured site is called North Head or locally known as "The Map" (it resembles a map of Australia when viewed from the air).

If this proposal is successful the region will undergo an irreversible transformation from one of the world's most pristine wilderness areas into an industrial eyesore.

I frequently work at Beagle Bay community as a doctor and believe that the proposed compulsory acquisition of land from this community will have major adverse effects on the health and general wellbeing of the Aboriginal people.

The land is an integral part of the

Aboriginal peoples' culture and way of life.

While the constitution permits compulsory acquisition with compensation paid "on just terms", it doesn't take into consideration the cultural value of the land or the devastation that would be caused by the dispossession of the Aboriginal people from their land.

To remove this community from their land will cause further devastation for generations to come. I believe that anxiety, depression and suicide rates will increase as a result of the industrialisation of the Kimberley.

Gnylmarung, the community at North Head, is just beginning to flourish as an ecotourism venture. It demonstrates the ingenuity of combining traditional life with a modern tourist industry.

There are many of these ventures scattered up the Dampier Peninsular, such as Middle Lagoon and Tappers Inlet, which are beginning to have their tourism potential realised.

These are fledgling enterprises that will be replaced by the LNG hub.

Not only would the economic benefits of these unique tourism ventures be lost but also the employment they provide and sense of empowerment they give to the local community.

There are alternatives available to the development of an LNG hub in the Kimberley, for example piping the gas to the industrial sites already established in the Pilbara.

This may be a more expensive alternative, but you cannot place a price on peoples' lives and their wellbeing.

*Dr Daniel Cloughton,
Broome,*

*Bonnie Fergie and Louise O' Halloran,
Nedlands.*