

INPEX in search for gas plant

THREE of the world's largest exploration companies could soon be operating in the Browse Basin.

Japanese exploration company Inpex are the latest to further their interest in the rich resources of liquefied natural gas off the Broome coastline.

The company already owns the Ichthys/Brewster gas field in the Browse Basin and recently lost out to rival company Shell for the rites to another adjacent site.

Inpex officials were in town and met with Rotary and Kimberley MLA Carol Martin during a brief visit last week.

Inpex external affairs officer Sean Kildair said the meetings were of a general nature, but would neither confirm or deny if the company was looking into building a plant in the Kimberley area.

"All options are still on the table," Mr Kildair said. "But things will develop down the line."

Mr Kildair said Inpex would be making regular visits to the Kimberley in the coming months with the next visit scheduled for March.

Woodside, which is 34 per cent owned by Shell, is exploring the possibilities of developing a processing plant somewhere in the Kimberley area. Shell will soon conduct seismic studies and plans to drill at least 12 wells.

Woodside has already decided against a study of sites on the Dampier Peninsula north of Broome for a gas plant after opposition from traditional owners, but is still exploring the Kimberley mainland as an option.

Broome Chamber of Commerce president Graham McGinn said Inpex, Shell and Woodside would be welcomed by the business community providing the town's trained personnel were not all lured to the resource giants.

Mr McGinn said local businesses were already struggling to recruit staff and the establishment of any gas plant would further stretch the town's workforce.

"We've already got Woodside knocking on the door, and another one might be a shock for the average person, but as far as businesses go staffing is the major issue," he said.