



Transcript

A community divided over plans for a major gas plant in the Kimberley.

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REBECCA CARMODY (PRESENTER): To cleaner energy now and the proposal for a multi-billion dollar gas plant that's dividing a Kimberley community. Pender Bay, north of Broome, is one of seven locations being considered by Woodside and its joint venture partners for a major LNG facility. Representatives from the company and the state government have been visiting the area to win the support of locals. And while the company is calling it community consultation, residents are describing it as divide and conquer. Claire Moodie reports.

CLAIRE MOODIE (REPORTER): We're at the start of the Cape Leveque Road, just north of Broome. It's a mainly dirt track which stretches about two hundred kilometres up the Dampier Peninsula, a long and uncomfortable journey. But there's a reward at the end of the bumpy ride. Vast stretches of deserted coastline, known as a resting area for humpback whales and their calves. Lennie O'Meara is one of several local Barde people making a living out of the tourists who come this far. He's been operating camel tours on the beach since taking out a 99-year lease over the aboriginal reserve. But this year, it's not just the camels who're unsettled.

LENNIE O'MEARA (MUNGET COMMUNITY): We never thought this would be part of the plan but it is and we have to do our best to try and stop it.

CLAIRE MOODIE (REPORTER): This view from Lennie's verandah could be about to change. Perpendicular Point is one of seven sites on Woodside's short-list for an LNG plant to service the Browse Basin, off the coast.

LENNIE O'MEARA (MUNGET COMMUNITY): He arrived here on a Saturday or Sunday unannounced, just rocked up. Peter Yu introduced me to him, "This is Brendan Hammond. He's working for the state, Alan Carpenter's right hand man. He's out here to talk about how he can help you." So we just spoke about Woodside.

CLAIRE MOODIE (REPORTER): Just down the road, Lennie's neighbours are feeling the pressure too. Pat and Dave Channing have taken out a similar lease over this sheltered cove and are accommodating their first tourists this season. They say they've told Woodside several times, they don't want a gas plant on their door-step.

PAT CHANNING (MERCEDES COVE): I don't know if they looked in the English dictionary what "no" means but you know they are still coming out and even when we

go to town people will approach and say what's happening? Are you going with Woodside?

CLAIRE MOODIE (REPORTER): At a nearby bush block, Deb Sibasado and partner Steve are also preparing for the start of the tourist season. They haven't had a personal visit from Woodside or the government but have a message for the company's CEO anyway.

STEVE NICHOLAS (DJUGARAGYN COMMUNITY): If I was talking to Don Voelte I'd say don't forget about cultural tourism. It's a massive industry and he can bring money directly to grassroots people. That's what we need. We don't need an industrialised park on our doorstep to help our people

CLAIRE MOODIE (REPORTER): Steve wants Woodside and its joint venture partners to opt for the only offshore site on their short list, at Scott Reef. But, just a stone-throw away, other neighbours are warming to the idea. Embalgun is a community of about 25 people, mainly dependent on government hand-outs. Its leader, Willie Smith, says he and his family are struggling to make ends meet.

WILLIE SMITH (EMBALGUN COMMUNITY): If we don't have exploration or otherwise, the future for us here is the dependence on government and taxpayer's money.

CLAIRE MOODIE (REPORTER): He too has plans for a tourism venture but says with recent cuts to CDEP funding, the aboriginal work-for-the-dole scheme, it'll be a struggle to get it off the ground. Willie's all but ready to sign a deal with Woodside.

WILLIE SMITH (EMBALGUN COMMUNITY): If they told me they were coming here tomorrow, I would be saying when can I get a job? When can I get a job?

CLAIRE MOODIE (REPORTER): Back in Broome, rumours have been filtering down by bush telegraph of multi-million-dollar compensation offers to residents on the Peninsula. While no one's been able to confirm the claims, there's growing concern about how the gas development could impact on the entire Kimberley coastline. Charter boat operator Kevin Blatchford is on a community reference group set up to guide Woodside on possible sites for its plant. His industry is becoming increasingly concerned about protecting the wilderness it sells to the world, with other companies, including Japanese firm Inpex also scrambling to exploit the gas reserves of the Browse.

KEVIN BLATCHFORD (KIMBERLEY MARINE TOURISM ASSOCIATION): Our industry's worth about 250 million dollars a year and what really concerns us is we've heard nothing from the state and federal governments on this issue. We're worried about what's already been promised to resource companies.

CLAIRE MOODIE (REPORTER): And the Kimberley Land Council, which is poised to lodge a native title claim over the Pender Bay area, isn't happy about the approaches made to individual residents.

WAYNE BERGMANN (KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL): Aboriginal people on

the peninsula need to talk to the land council. You cannot trust the information that is coming from people paid by the company.

CLAIRE MOODIE (REPORTER): Brendan Hammond of the state government's Office of Development Approvals, who's been visiting the Peninsula, has declined repeated requests for an interview. The state government and Woodside also declined to be interviewed by Stateline. Meanwhile back up on the peninsula, the uncertainty is causing divisions. The prospect of big money has some dreaming of new infrastructure, including a sealed road up from Broome.

WILLIE SMITH (EMBALGUN COMMUNITY): It's just a matter of sitting down and negotiating the best deal I believe, yes.

CLAIRE MOODIE (REPORTER): But for many others, it's not negotiable.

DEBORAH SIBOSADO AND STEVE NICHOLAS (DJUGARAGYN COMMUNITY): We definitely can not be bought out. No no definitely won't be bought out. But there are people who will sell out. If they do, we just hope that they consider that there are other people who share this peninsula.