

KLC negotiates gas

By DALE MILLER

THE Kimberley Land Council has given the strongest indication yet it will support plans by Japanese resource company Inpex to build a gas processing plant off the far north Kimberley coast.

The two parties are expected to hold a sign-off ceremony on negotiation protocols in the next few weeks for an agreement on Inpex's plans to build the LNG plant on the Maret Islands – about 450km north-east of Broome.

KLC executive director Wayne Bergmann said traditional owners were prepared to find a location for an LNG development off the Kimberley coast and needed both industry and government to come to the table.

“We don't want to be mere royalty takers in any deal, we want to be equity participants,” he said. “We want to have ownership in these projects as well and this agreement is not just about traditional owners along the coast, this agreement is about the effect that it will have on the whole Kimberley population.”

Mr Bergmann said the KLC would work on a final agreement with Inpex in the next 12 to 18 months. He said traditional owners would be seeking community benefits, business opportunities and the setting up of a trust with a “financial compensation component”.

“There's increasing pressure on Aboriginal people to be more economically independent and this is

consistent with our traditional beliefs,” he said. “The country is still providing for us, it's providing in a different way.”

Mr Bergmann's comments followed a protest earlier this month organised by conservationists and tourism operators at the Maret Islands opposing Inpex's plans.

Protester and local filmmaker Richard Costin said no-one could begrudge traditional owners the opportunity to put a bit of money behind them but he described the handling of negotiations as “divisive”.

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KLC prepares to negotiate gas projects

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“Unfortunately only a few of the native title holders in these areas are being consulted on these issues and not everyone's being included so from that point of view it's going to have a really bad effect through the Aboriginal communities,” he said. In a letter sent to Premier Alan Carpenter, conservation groups said oil and gas companies were being allowed to stake claims over the

Kimberley's majestic landscapes largely in the absence of the guiding hand of government.

“We believe that it is inherently premature for any specific proposals for gas processing plants to be made in the absence of a rigorous regional assessment, developed with intensive community input and the best available information,” the letter said.

State Development Minister Eric Ripper said deliberations over LNG plants in the Kimberley and Maret Islands were continuing but claimed it was not appropriate for the Government to comment further on them at this time.

He said the percentage of area required for an LNG hub represented about 0.002 per cent of the Kimberley coast.