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AM - Kimberley locals oppose Govt gas processing plan

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AM - Friday, 19 October , 2007 08:21:00

Reporter: David Weber

PETER CAVE: The West Australian Government is trying to find locations for two gas processing hubs in the Kimberley, despite the opposition of locals. Proponents are keen for approvals so they can start taking gas from the large reserves in the Browse Basin, 400 kilometres north of Broome.

But local interest groups say there should be no more than one area given over to the LNG (liquefied natural gas) industry.

David Weber reports.

DAVID WEBER: The taskforce is trying to find the best way to develop the Browse gas reserves. The State Development Minister Eric Ripper says investment and job opportunities need to be balanced with a concern for the environment.

ERIC RIPPER: The Kimberley coastline is 2,500 kilometres long, and what would be required for an LNG processing hub would be no more than 0.2 per cent of the total landmass of the Kimberley. I'm convinced that we can find a location, or at most two locations, which will enable us to strike the right balance between economic development and environment and heritage matters.

DAVID WEBER: The companies with interests in the Browse Basin include Woodside, Shell and the Japanese company, Inpex.

Eric Ripper.

ERIC RIPPER: Certainly there has been a proposal by the Inpex group to locate an LNG processing plant on the Maret Islands. We've said we're not opposed in principle to the use of the Maret Islands, but there's many environmental approvals, Aboriginal heritage approvals and native title approvals that would have to be gone through before, in practice, any plant could be located on those islands.

DAVID WEBER: But interest groups in the Kimberley say two hubs is one too many.

Kevin Blatchford of the Marine Tourism Association.

KEVIN BLATCHFORD: Nought-point-two per cent of the entire coast? Well, you know, that's like saying it's only 0.2 per cent of the Great Barrier Reef or of Ningaloo,

you know. The Kimberley is very precious to a lot of people, and especially precious to the tourism industry that revolves around it. You know, the environment and the industries that already exist should come first.

DAVID WEBER: What about the Maret Islands as an option, is that acceptable for one of the hubs at least?

KEVIN BLATCHFORD: Well, we're not interested in talking about more than one hub. We just don't think we should feel pressured because of one proponent has a timeline. What's more important is to get it right, not necessarily to hurry up and make a decision.

DAVID WEBER: The groups opposing the two-hub proposal want an environmental assessment of the coastline from the Kimberley down to the Pilbara. They want the existing developments in the Pilbara to be considered in the context of what's being proposed for the Browse Basin.

Paul Gamblin of the World Wildlife Fund.

PAUL GAMBLIN: We believe that it's going to be absolutely crucial for the Government to commit resources to do an assessment of the natural and cultural values of the Kimberley-Pilbara coastline, to set that broad context, and then appropriate development in a single hub should only be considered as a consequence of that analysis.

PETER CAVE: WWF spokesman Paul Gamblin speaking to David Weber.

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