

Kimberley council meets Woodside

Victoria Laurie | *December 10, 2007*

A SECOND oil and gas giant has begun discussions with Kimberley Aborigines over locating a gas processing plant on the pristine northwest coast, as environmental groups gave their reluctant blessing to a Kimberley oil and gas future.

The Kimberley Land Council revealed yesterday that Woodside chief executive Don Voelte and the company's senior management met the traditional owners in Perth last week.

The meeting, instigated by the KLC, was the first overture between Kimberley Aborigines and Australia's biggest domestic gas producer since the land council told Woodside two years ago it would not be allowed to locate industrial development on the Kimberley coast.

KLC executive director Wayne Bergmann said last week's meeting was aimed at reopening talks with the traditional owners at One Arm Point, north of Broome, one of several sites suggested as possible locations for an onshore plant to process the vast untapped reserves of Browse Basin gas, 200km off the Kimberley coast.

The land council is already in negotiations with Japanese government-owned gas producer INPEX, the first Browse Basin resource developer to indicate interest in siting an LNG plant on tiny Maret Islands, about 400km north-north-east.

Mr Bergmann said that if Woodside went ahead with developing its huge Browse Basin reserves, it would be bigger than any resource project ever undertaken in Australia. "The meeting was significant because the same senior leaders who told Woodside to go last time were at last week's meeting," he said.

"Our preliminary engagement with Woodside has been very positive, and they have expressed a strong willingness to work closely with the land council and senior people in finding the right way to find a site in the Kimberley, rather than dictating their preferred location."

Among other options being considered by Woodside is building the processing plant offshore at Scott Reef or piping the gas to the Burrup Peninsula, the site of the North West Shelf LNG project and Woodside's recently approved \$12 billion Pluto LNG project, now under construction.

Leading environmental groups gave the green light to oil and gas industry for the Kimberley yesterday, signing a joint statement with the KLC that acknowledged the significant potential for beneficial outcomes for traditional owners from LNG and associated development.

The World Wildlife Fund, Australian Conservation Foundation and Environs Kimberley joined indigenous leaders in Broome to sign the agreement, which stipulates that cultural and environmental protection should be paramount in industrial growth along the Kimberley coast.

Mr Bergmann said the KLC was seeking to engage directly with oil and gas companies to spread benefits to the Aboriginal people.

"The resource boom has changed the lives of a lot of people in Western Australia, but Aboriginal people are still being shut out," he said.