

Kimberley locals push to save wilderness

Nicola Berkovic

ALBERT Wiggan grew up on the Kimberley coast of Western Australia, swimming with dugongs and turtles.

The Bardi man says the land of his childhood is precious and needs protecting.

He has taken a stand against resource giants he believes, through their developments, could threaten the environment and harm indigenous culture.

Mr Wiggan, 26, from One Arm Point, north of Broome, is part of the Save the Kimberley group, made up of concerned residents, tourism operators and business people. Their most prominent member is filmmaker and crocodile hunter Malcolm Douglas.

“The Kimberleys is a unique

wilderness environment,” Mr Wiggan said. “The minute industry puts its footprint on such a beautiful land, it’s very hard to take it back.”

Woodside Petroleum, Shell, Chevron, Total and BP have made moves to exploit multi-billion-dollar oil and gas reserves in the Browse basin, 400km off the Kimberley coast. But the companies lack onshore facilities to process the gas.

Japanese Government-owned Inpex is the furthest along with its proposal to bring the gas onshore. It is seeking approval for a processing plant on the Maret Islands off the northwest Kimberley coast.

Environmentalists say the coral-fringed islands are the state’s most important turtle

breeding ground and close to a breeding area for humpback whales.

Mr Wiggan and Douglas arrived in Sydney yesterday to raise awareness.

Douglas said the group was not anti-development. “We want the development,” he said. “We have to have it. But it needs to be in an appropriate place.

“Inpex want to put a large industrial plant right in the middle of this pristine wilderness. It’s a very inappropriate place.

“What we’re doing is asking the government at a state and federal level for Inpex to reconsider where they’re going to put their LNG plant.”

The men have been to Broome and Perth with their Kimberley conservation message and the

next stop is Canberra.

The Australian Greens back the campaign. West Australian senator Rachel Siewert said: “We’ve been deeply concerned about the way things have been unfolding in the Kimberleys for some time. It’s one of the last untouched areas in Australia.”

She said the issue would be the next big environmental debate in Australia. “We need to ensure that development in the Kimberleys occurs in a sustainable manner, and doesn’t repeat the mistakes of the south,” Senator Siewert said. “We need to get it right for once.”

The WA Government’s Northern Development Taskforce is expected to report on the issue at the end of March.



‘Appropriate’ development campaign: Albert Wiggan, left, with filmmaker and crocodile hunter Malcolm Douglas in Sydney yesterday

Picture: Sam Mooy