

# Gas site decision closer

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A specially-appointed government taskforce is one step closer to revealing the future home of WA's first on-shore gas processing hub on the remote Kimberley coast.

Servicing Australia's biggest gas field, the Browse Basin, the multi-user facility is tipped to become the State's next billion-dollar industrial address.

But controversy has plagued site selection and in July the Northern Development Taskforce was set up to pinpoint locations that would best protect the unique Kimberley environment.

While a final recommendation is not expected until the end of the year, the task force has confirmed it is only weeks away from releasing the long-awaited site selection criteria.

Taskforce secretariat Duncan Ord said the hit-list would separate the good from the bad and help narrow the number of potential sites being considered. He said the selection criteria were developed after months of extensive consultation with local indigenous people, industry leaders and community members.

"Once the significance of the

Browse Basin gas resource was realised, we started work to minimise the industrial footprint of future development in the area," Mr Ord said.

"We've faced a number of key challenges in identifying a suitable and economically attractive location for the proposed hub.

"Some of the challenges have included operating in an environmentally sensitive area, ensuring we don't force development on the local indigenous people and satisfying concerns of pearling and tourism operators.

"By publishing a comprehensive set of site selection criteria we hope all stakeholders will be satisfied that the process of site selection has been inclusive and transparent."

Mr Ord said the information would help the task force weigh-up the individual merits of each site and also identify "fatal flaws" which would immediately exclude sites from the list of hopefuls.

"There are a number of different components we will use to determine an appropriate hub site, including making sure the location is safe and technically viable," he said.

"Aspects we will consider will be

potential community and environmental impacts, as well as indigenous heritage issues, topography and proximity to port facilities, among many things.

"Once the criteria are published it will be opened up for comment and can be refined and expanded if our stakeholder groups deem it necessary.

"This will provide the framework on which we base our location recommendation to Cabinet, which I am quietly confident will take place in late 2008."

Slated for development in 2014, the decision could not come soon enough for natural gas exporters who have invested billions in the Browse Basin.

Woodside, Shell and Japan's Inpex Holdings are just three of the companies which have paid handsomely for exploration permits in the 140,000 square kilometre gas field.

With the ink still drying on a \$45-billion preliminary sales contract with PetroChina, time is critical in achieving Woodside's first cargo scheduled for delivery in 2013 to 2015.