

Gas announcements are not all they seem

THE recent meetings of the northern Development Taskforce in Broome and the WWF workshop have raised the stakes in the campaign to save the Kimberley coast from industrial development.

Garrett's announcements should be treated with extreme caution and carefully considered in two parts.

The announcement of the environmental and heritage listing is a positive step forward. The Federal Government has now formally recognised the importance of the Kimberley region.

This assessment process will take at least two years. The information gathered through this process will have no bearing on the imminent selection of a site for a hub to process LNG for the Browse Basin.

This announcement may also be providing a smokescreen for the rushed approval of sites for both Woodside and Inpex under section 146 of the EPBC Act (Minister may agree on strategic assessment).

Section 146 also allows for the Minister to approve Inpex's proposed development on the Maret Islands.

This may be driven by trade agreements or negotiations between the Australian and

Japanese governments over the supply of gas to Japan.

The Joint Strategic Assessment to be carried out by the WA State Government and the Federal Government will be fatally flawed.

The Northern Development Taskforce is expected to announce a shortlist of sites by the end of June.

This will give no time to properly assess the environmental and heritage values of the region or to consider the cumulative impacts of these developments.

The independence and partiality of the Northern Development Taskforce in this process should be considered.

The chairman of the NDT, Jim Limerick, is an expert on oil and gas-related matters.

He is the director general of the Department of Industry and Resources which is also the designated authority for the management of the WA offshore oil and gas industry, which is administered under the Petroleum Submerged Lands Act.

Because of the national importance of issues related to the development of the offshore oil and gas industry in the Kimberley, the strategic assessment should be considered by an independent

commission of enquiry and also by both houses of Parliament at a Federal level.

Section 29 Part 4 Division 1 of the EPBC Act should also be considered in relation to this issue.

The critical issue is that once the Federal Government annexes areas out of the Kimberley coast for industrial development, the decision cannot be challenged under new amendment 158A of the Act.

The strategic assessment process should run in parallel with the heritage assessment which would allow time to properly assess and consider these issues.

At the moment there is sufficient world class peer reviewed scientific information available on greenhouse emissions and climate change to challenge the validity of the proposed strategic assessment process.

The WWF Broome workshop recognised that there is insufficient scientific information available to support a decision on the selection of a gas processing hub in the Kimberley in the next four months.

**Richard Costin,
Broome.**