

Browse gas plans unfurled

Estimated costs have not been released but analysts believe the project will cost \$US25-30 billion

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AUSTRALIA'S biggest gas development is being planned for deep in the Indian Ocean 425km north of Broome with the aim of delivering major export revenue well in to the second half of the century. Perth-based Woodside Petroleum has for the first time released broad plans for the proposed Browse Basin investment, for which it already has secured export orders worth up to \$90 billion.

A number of other Browse LNG plans are being developed by a raft of domestic and global gas companies.

Woodside and its partners, Shell, BHP Billiton, Chevron and BP, are planning to develop the Torosa, Brecknock and Calliance gas fields about 290km off the Kimberley coast.

Estimated costs for the total development have not been released but industry analysts believe it will involve investment of \$US25-30 billion.

The project partners have yet to determine whether the gas will be processed onshore at a WA government-

sponsored LNG hub expected to be close to Broome, or near the existing North West Shelf gas processing facilities about 1200km to the south.

Documents presented to the federal Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts on the so-called Browse Upstream Development say the operating life of the facilities is expected to be more than 40 years.

Most of the three gas condensate fields planned to be developed in the Browse by Woodside and its partners are in deep water up to 700m. They were discovered between 1971 and 2000 and are estimated to contain 18 trillion cubic feet of gas and 300 million barrels of condensate or light oil.

The gas reserves are about twice as great as the initial estimate for the NW Shelf fields that supply the Burrup Peninsula plant, which became Australia's first export LNG operation in 1989.

The environmental assessment documents show the planned Browse development to be huge.

It will involve a number of wells

connected on the seafloor or from floating platforms by a web of pipelines up to 840km in length to offshore gas processing platforms that will in turn be connected to onshore facilities. The environmental proposal says natural gas condensate will be separated and exported to market via tankers that load directly from buoys close to the offshore processing facility.

It is also planned that carbon dioxide will be removed onshore and reinjected into gas reservoirs, depending on where the onshore LNG facility is located.

The documents say the proponents are trying to avoid having "a direct footprint" on the lagoons of north and south Scott Reef.

Environmentalists maintain Scott Reef has a distinct and pristine ecosystem that would be destroyed by gas processing facilities.

Last year Woodside announced it had signed understandings to supply Browse LNG to PetroChina and Taiwan's China Petroleum Co.