

# Indigenous power to veto is a danger, says Barnett

YASMINE PHILLIPS

WA's future economic development would be endangered by State and Federal government plans to give traditional owners the ultimate say on approval for a multi-billion-dollar onshore gas processing centre, Opposition MP Colin Barnett said yesterday.

State Development Minister Eric Ripper confirmed that the development of a single gas hub in the Browse Basin off Broome would centre on approval by the land's indigenous owners.

"We will not develop LNG in the West Kimberley unless we have the informed consent and substantial economic participation of traditional owners — that's a minimum requirement for us to proceed," he said. "We recognise at the State level that the West Kimberley is a very sensitive ar-

ea environmentally . . . we need to develop the Browse Basin gas resources but we need to do it in a way which respects the environmental and heritage values of the West Kimberley."

Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett joined Mr Ripper on a West Kimberley visit yesterday in a bid to balance the sensitive environmental, cultural and economic considerations of such a development.

But Mr Barnett, a former resources minister, said any move to offer a particular stakeholder group the right of veto would "send shudders down the spines" of project owners by creating a dangerous precedent.

"I think it is a huge danger to future development and it is clearly sovereign risk," he said. "I think this is potentially a very serious and very dangerous precedent and I'm not sure if Eric Ripper or Peter Garrett understand what they're saying."

Mr Barnett clarified that he was not questioning the need for indigenous consultation but argued court-determined and negotiated compensation payouts were the only appropriate way of balancing native title issues with economic development.

"I just don't think it's a proper and reasonable thing to be doing from a State Government point of view when mining and petroleum are the backbone of our economy," he said.

Kimberley Land Council executive director Wayne Bergmann said he was not yet convinced that a single hub was the best option for the traditional land owners but he welcomed the opportunity to have input. "The decision that we make is for the next 50-100 years therefore we need to ensure that Aboriginal people participate in this process on a level footing," he said. "It is too early to be able to say categorically where we stand."



Having a say: Traditional owners, such as Albert Wiggan who protested this month, will be heard by governments