

Browse hub is uncertain

By STEVEN HOUNSOME

STATE Development Minister Eric Ripper has downplayed the likelihood of Japanese resource company Inpex withdrawing its interest in WA and setting up operations in Darwin.

He was speaking during a trip to Broome last week.

"They're looking elsewhere because they need to consider other sites, but I think there are commercial arguments against going to Darwin," Mr Ripper said.

He was confident a site satisfactory to Inpex would be found in WA.

Accompanying Mr Ripper on Thursday's visit was Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett.

The two were in the region liaising with stakeholders, including the Kimberley Land Council, Save the Kimberley and traditional owners, over the proposed Browse Basin gas developments.

Both ministers confirmed their support for a single hub and stressed

the importance of addressing environmental and indigenous cultural concerns during the development process.

"We support gas processing in the West Kimberley, but it will only go ahead with the full support of indigenous owners and if there is economic participation for those people," Mr Ripper said.

He declined to be drawn on possible locations for a gas processing hub.

The Northern Development Taskforce, chaired by Jim Limerick from the Department of Industry and Resources, is engaged in a study to determine sites to minimise the impact of industry on the Kimberley coastline.

Mr Ripper said he was delighted to form a partnership with the Federal Government in addressing the issue.

"We won't always agree; I think people would think it was a conspir-

acy if an environment minister and development minister always agreed," he said.

Mr Garrett said co-operation between the two governments was essential, so that mistakes of the past were not repeated and ad-hoc development was avoided.

Although he did not rule out the Maret Islands for development, Mr Garrett was not in support of a site on the islands.

He also declined to comment on the merits of gas processing in the NT against WA but said sites outside the Kimberley were still being considered.

Save The Kimberley's Peter Tucker told Mr Garrett his group did not support LNG processing in the Kimberley but would still seek royalties for traditional owners in the region.

KLC chairman Wayne Bergmann welcomed Mr Ripper and Mr Garrett to the region.



Eric Ripper and Peter Garrett - nothing firm on gas basin development.