

Total control sought

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JAPANESE gas giant Inpex has urged the Territory Government to start lobbying its French business partner to build a \$12billion plant in Darwin.

Chief Minister Paul Henderson will fly to Paris on Sunday to meet the vice-president of energy giant Total -- which has a 24 per cent stake in the Ichthys gas project of Western Australia.

The NT Government wants Inpex to pipe the gas to Darwin instead of WA.

Mr Henderson said the Territory was still the "underdog". Inpex has told the Chief Minister it is time to make his pitch to Total, which must agree with Inpex on where to build.

"I want the Total board members, when they make this decision, to have Darwin at the forefront of their mind," Mr Henderson said.

"We're offering Darwin as a very attractive alternative as a gas-ready site -- the only gas-ready site in the whole of northern Australia."

He admitted the Territory had been "a bit cheeky" trying to steal the project from Western Australia.

"We've gone in under the radar," he said.

"We've snuck across the border. "We've said, 'if you can't finish your project on time, have a look at us'."

But Opposition Leader Terry Mills, who two weeks ago backflipped over his opposition to building the plant on Darwin

Harbour, said the Government should still negotiate access to downstream domestic gas supplies.

"The Territory needs access to gas to develop its industrial base," he said.

"I'm amazed the Chief Minister thinks there is no need to negotiate domestic access to some of the huge amounts of LNG that may be processed in Darwin."

Western Australia is negotiating to keep 15 per cent of Inpex's gas for domestic use, but the Territory's energy needs should be met for the next 20 years by reserves in the Joseph Bonaparte Gulf.

Mr Henderson said this would give the Territory an advantage in negotiations.