

Kimberley owners shortlist Browse gas hub sites

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Traditional owners in the Kimberley have narrowed the shortlist of potential sites for a major gas hub to serve the Browse Basin, but a cloud hangs over the future of the project because of the uncertainty over the election outcome in Western Australia.

In February, federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett announced he would use federal environment laws to force natural gas producers in the Browse Basin off Western Australia to develop and use one processing hub.

A range of companies with major projects in the area – notably Woodside and Inpex – had been seeking to develop individual gas processing operations, and the move came amid concerns about the environmental impact these would have on the area.

Inpex has subsequently played a significant role in both the Northern Territory and WA elections by contemplating building its plant in one

location or the other.

WA Liberal leader Colin Barnett claimed in the lead-up to the state election that the Labor government's consultation process for building a hub in the Kimberley would result in Inpex moving to Darwin.

But the Carpenter government has insisted it would stick to its consultation process – in conjunction with the federal government – which includes giving traditional owners of the region input into what sites might be chosen for development.

However, indigenous leaders are clearly concerned that they may lose any influence over the siting of the gas hub amid the election uncertainty. They have been in Canberra this week lobbying federal ministers to increase the government's involvement in the process from one that simply focuses on environmental issues.

The Kimberley Land Council said yesterday that traditional owners had

come up with a shortlist of potential sites suitable for development of a gas hub "providing conditions regarding lasting economic benefits and cultural and environmental protections are guaranteed".

The four potential areas traditional owners are willing to consider for further consultation regarding gas development are: Gourdon Bay, James Price Point, North Head and Anjo Peninsula.

Kimberley Land Council's executive director, Wayne Bergmann, said ensuring traditional owners had control of where and how gas development proceeded was the best way to make sure the resource boom benefited the broader community. But he said the process was dependent on government and resource companies providing traditional owners with information and meeting conditions to ensure communities would gain long-term benefits from development.