

Barnett urged not to rush for Inpex

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The Liberal-National government should not rush a decision on a site for a gas processing plant in the Kimberley, with conservationists warning it would be environmentally reckless to do so just to stop the multi-billion-dollar project being lost to Darwin.

WA Conservation Council director Piers Verstegen said it was critical for a single site to be developed as a gas processing hub in the Kimberley and warned against a knee-jerk decision to accommodate the Inpex project.

Premier-elect Colin Barnett moved yesterday to reassure environment groups that the push to identify a site for gas processing facilities would not compromise the need for proper environmental approvals, revealing his preference would be to find a location where projects could be co-located on

government-owned land leased to proponents.

Mr Barnett, who has promised to act immediately to find a site for Inpex but suspects it may be too late to avoid the \$25 billion project being moved to Darwin, said he did not support a spread of gas plants along the Kimberley coastline. Co-located plants would mean basic infrastructure could be shared, while still allowing proponents to process their own gas supplies.

Mr Verstegen said Mr Barnett had to come clean on whether he supported the work of the Northern Development Taskforce, set up by the previous government to investigate locations for a gas processing hub. He said a preferred site had been due to be announced next month, with environmental, heritage and native title approvals expected by 2010.

“The traditional owners and

environment groups have been engaging in good faith with a government process that has been going for some time,” Mr Verstegen said.

“To throw that out just to try to attract Inpex for a particular site could potentially be quite environmentally reckless.

“The information isn’t there at the moment to be able to choose a site with those environmental concerns taken care of because the work just hasn’t been done.”

World Wildlife Fund Australia is also urging Mr Barnett not to abandon the taskforce research, which spokesman Paul Gamblin said could result in further delays as well as risks to the region’s environment and cultural heritage.

He said the Government should try to avoid repeating the mistake of making decisions which would be regretted in decades to come, such as had occurred on the Burrup.