

Ferguson wants decision on Inpex's LNG plant

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Federal Resources Minister Martin Ferguson says he doesn't care where in Australia Japanese gas giant Inpex builds its new plant, so long as a decision is made "sooner not later".

Inpex had originally planned to build a liquid natural gas plant on the Maret Islands, about 200km north of Broome, to process gas shipped from its Browse Basin's Ichthys field.

But environmentalists seeking to protect the Kimberley coast put a brake on negotiations while Darwin, with a deal that would see gas piped 900km to a new LNG plant at Middle Arm, threw its hat into the ring.

NT Chief Minister Paul Henderson released an ACIL Tasman report to the 2008 South East Asia Australia Offshore Conference in Darwin today, forecasting a Top End plant would inject \$50 billion over two decades into the NT economy.

"I am fighting hard to give Inpex certainty it needs to invest in this project in the Territory," Mr Henderson said.

The report, based on the start of site work in 2010, found benefits flowing through to small business in a range of industries including manufacturing, maintenance, transport, training, office equipment and accommodation.

There is speculation that Darwin, posing less hurdles, is currently the frontrunner although Mr Ferguson refused to say where he wanted the plant built.

"To me, Inpex is like Sunrise, we want the investment and we want the development but it is a matter for those companies to determine what is appropriate for them commercially," he told reporters after the conference.

"It's not for me to suggest Darwin is better than the Kimberleys. It's for Inpex to decide what is better for Inpex and for Japan."

But, Mr Ferguson said, it was time for action.

"There is urgent need to bring on this project from Japan's point of view and I have met with representatives of Inpex and the Japanese government in Tokyo, I will be going there again in a couple of weeks, and I simply say to those people it's your decision," he said.

“Whatever your decision is we will do everything we can to facilitate investment in Australia because we want the development of the field...

“I simply want a decision one way or the other.”

Mr Ferguson denied a Darwin plant would spell the end of the Kimberley hub, saying other companies had expressed interest in the region.