

# Barnett to make most of COAG

Editorial Comment in *The Sunday Times*

September 27, 2008 10:00pm

**AS Premier of Western Australia, Colin Barnett will have a chance to showcase the state when he attends the Council of Australian Governments in Perth this week.**

Having led the Liberals alliance to an election victory early this month, Mr Barnett will find himself the odd man out – the only Liberal Premier among a nest of Labor leaders.

The COAG meeting was to have been Mr Rudd's big moment. He would have expected a Carpenter government victory in WA which would have maintained wall-to-wall Labor throughout the country.

But despite Mr Barnett's surprise success, Mr Rudd is still expected to follow his normal practice of sharing COAG's top billing with the host state's Premier. It would be churlish of the Prime Minister to do otherwise.

In the light of new Treasurer Troy Buswell's gloomy remarks on WA's finances and the need to review major projects because of cost blowouts, it is important for Mr Barnett to present WA's bright future at the COAG.

On Thursday, perhaps with the meeting in mind, Mr Barnett was quick to criticise Mr Rudd over the Japanese oil-and-gas giant Inpex's decision to build a \$12 billion gas plant in Darwin instead of in WA's north.

Mr Barnett admitted that it was probably a long shot at this stage to get Inpex to change its mind and build the plant in WA, but its final investment decision is at least 12-18 months away so it is worth trying.

"In that time, if a site could be established and cleared in every sense, then maybe commercial sense will prevail and they will be attracted to the lower cost option," he said.

Mr Barnett also appealed for "some truth" at a federal level – keeping true, as he put it, to the federal policy on greenhouse emissions.

"Whatever anyone might think about the emissions trading scheme proposals, it just seems to be self-evident that as a nation we should do the direct easy things to reduce greenhouse emissions and we should avoid things that unnecessarily increase emissions," he said.

"By piping that gas to Darwin . . . it has a significant effect on greenhouse emissions. Therefore, it is not a sound decision."

West Australians will agree with these sentiments and at the COAG meeting Mr Barnett should strongly push the case to have the plant built in WA's north.