

Barnett may axe gas hub task force

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Speculation is mounting that Colin Barnett will scrap a high-level task force the Carpenter government set up to investigate sites for a gas processing hub in the Kimberley when he releases the group's report this week.

The Premier was briefed on the Northern Development Taskforce's report last week and has committed to release it publicly, possibly today.

But he was highly critical of the task force and non-committal about its future after last month's decision by Japanese company Inpex to build a \$25 billion gas plant in Darwin rather than the Kimberley.

He said then that the task force added uncertainty to the processes involved in selecting a site and did not produce the required result.

Opposition Leader Eric Ripper, the

Kimberley Land Council, Woodside and World Wildlife Fund Australia have all called on the Premier to retain the task force, which includes senior staff from government departments.

WWF spokesman Paul Gamblin said a decision on where to locate any gas processing infrastructure should only be made once the strategic assessment of the Kimberley, announced by Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett in February, to ensure the area was not spoiled by development, was completed.

The strategic assessment currently under way in the Kimberley should also include the Pilbara because development options there needed to be investigated.

He said vast parts of WA's unique Kimberley must be off limits to liquefied natural gas plants and called on

the Barnett Government to support the process to have 17 million hectares of the region put on the national heritage list.

"The Kimberley ... is one of the most outstanding places on Earth," he said. "It stacks up against anywhere else and there are species found in the Kimberley that are found nowhere else.

"It's clear that big parts of that area are off limits to development ... the extent to which that is the case should be the subject of scientific cultural analysis."

Mr Barnett said last week he strongly supported the protection of the Kimberley coastline but the Government needed to make a decision on the site for a hub.



In doubt: Premier Colin Barnett has criticised the northern task force