

More hurdles for Kimberley LNG plan

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More doubt has been cast on the State Government's push to locate an LNG hub at North Head in the Kimberley, with the release of a Federal Government report finding the local marine environment contains unique ecological features and is a haven for vulnerable species.

The report on the North-West Marine Region, that will be used to create a plan to protect marine and animal life, found the region has 151 species protected under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, with 17 of those listed as threatened.

The area around North Head, 26km from Beagle Bay, which Colin Barnett has named as his preferred site, has been identified as a nursery for humpback whales and a feeding ground for flatback turtles, both of which are listed as vulnerable species.

It is also home to other protected species including birds, sea snakes and

fish. Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett said yesterday the region was one of the country's most environmentally sensitive and economically important ocean areas and the Government was committed to ensuring any economic development in the Kimberley was carried out in an ecologically sustainable way.

Mr Garrett said the strategic assessment of the Kimberley, announced in February, was the most efficient and effective process to deliver economic benefits while safeguarding the environmental, cultural and heritage values of the region.

The assessment requires consideration of processing options outside the Kimberley, including the Pilbara.

Environmental groups called yesterday on the State Government to defer any decision on the gas hub site.

The WA Wilderness Society, WA Conservation Council and Environs Kimberley said in a joint statement that the global economic downturn, recent whale research findings and a State Government campaign to lure

tourists to the Kimberley were all evidence that the process of finding a site should not be rushed.

Wilderness Society co-ordinator Peter Robertson said the fact a number of companies were putting approved projects on the backburner showed there was now no prospect of a Browse Basin gas hub being needed for several years.

Mr Robertson said the hub should be located outside the Kimberley, possibly in the Pilbara, where there was already industrial infrastructure.

The Kimberley Land Council has accused the State Government of riding roughshod over Aboriginals after the Premier scrapped the right of veto the former government had promised traditional owners.

KLC executive director Wayne Bergmann met Mr Barnett yesterday and said he was concerned the Premier planned to compulsorily acquire traditional lands to develop the hub.

Mr Barnett said a site for the gas precinct in the Kimberley had to be determined as a matter of urgency.



Worried: Kimberley Land Council's Wayne Bergmann says an LNG hub could be forced on Aboriginals. Picture: John Mokrzycki