

Beagle Bay voices LNG opposition

By STEVEN HOUNSOME

A PLANNED meeting by the Northern Development Taskforce with the Beagle Bay community to discuss the proposed LNG processing hub was abandoned last week after a blockade of community members told representatives they were not welcome.

North Head, near Beagle Bay, is one of four sites being considered along with Gourdon Bay, James Price Point and Anjo Peninsula.

Blockade organiser Albert Wiggan said about 60 people attended the protest and voiced their concerns to the NDT during a 10 minute discussion.

A Beagle Bay council was disbanded several years ago and Mr Wiggan said he was concerned the Kimberley Land Council consultation process had not given non-traditional owners a voice.

"There shouldn't be consultation until the community has governance," he said.

"The actual community at Beagle Bay, who aren't all traditional owners, have been totally neglected.

"KLC have literally failed us, but they're doing a good job of turning my people against me."

One of the issues the NDT intended to raise at the meeting was drilling for core samples to determine the suitability of North Head as a hub site.

But Mr Wiggan said he was concerned drilling was not happening at the three other sites, indicating the Government was fixed on North Head.

He said he wanted the gas piped to the Pilbara where there was more suitable land for a hub.

NDT deputy director general Gail McGowan said the meeting, like similar meetings at Lombadina, Djarindjin and Middle Lagoon, was intended to update the community.

And while she said she had been happy to talk to protesters, she said the group numbered only about 20 and was not representative of the whole community.

Ms McGowan said she understood Mr Wiggan's concern at non-traditional owners not getting a voice, but conceded she did not

have an answer to the problem.

But she denied that drilling indicated North Head had been chosen and said there was still a possibility of piping to the Pilbara.

KLC chairman Wayne Bergmann said he understood the frustration which led to the blockade.

"But I would expect non-traditional owners to show respect to traditional owners," he said.

"I understand others have generational attachments to the Kimberley, but this is TOs' first opportunity to express their traditional rights."

He refuted Mr Wiggan's claim industry would diminish indigenous culture.

A decision on the site is expected by the end of the year after the NDT goes through 200 public submissions and makes a report to the Environmental Protection Authority.



IMPASSE: Albert Wiggan and Gail McGowan at Beagle Bay. PICTURE: MEREDITH BENKE.