

I'll take West Australian native land: Barnett

Amanda O'Brien, WA political reporter | *December 11, 2008*

WEST Australian Premier Colin Barnett has used a speech to 500 business leaders to reveal he will forcibly acquire land from Aboriginal people in the Kimberley to provide a site for a major gas-processing precinct.

Mr Barnett admitted the plan "may sound radical" but he said it was necessary.

"If we don't do that there will be no LNG development in the Kimberley and there will be no benefits for the community, both indigenous communities and indeed the wider community," he said. "I will be doing everything I can to grab that opportunity for the state."

Kimberley Land Council executive director Wayne Bergman said the announcement was heavy-handed and objectionable and he was seeking legal advice.

"We urge the Premier to work with Kimberley Aboriginal people to find a negotiated solution. We are committed to responsible development but heavy-handed approaches through compulsory acquisition will not provide any worthwhile benefits," he said.

"It's no surprise that the most disadvantaged people are being put further under pressure for big business. It's been a consistent message from the Premier."

Mr Barnett told the business audience that his Government would be "unashamedly pro-development". It would be a theme in everything he did.

He said provisions in the Public Works Act would be used to acquire the land so that private companies could build gas-processing plants near the giant Browse Basin gas reserve, which is estimated to hold at least 30 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. "We'll acquire it as government-owned land and we will lease it out to proponents, whether it is Woodside, Inpex or anyone else in the future," he said.

"That may sound radical. I assure you it's not. That is the way that most industrial land in Western Australia has been acquired and operated." Compensation would be provided to the indigenous landowners.

Mr Barnett said the failure of the former government to find land in the area for Japanese company Inpex to build a gas plant was "the greatest embarrassment in this state's history" and that it would not occur under his watch.

Inpex announced in October that it was moving its \$15 billion project to Darwin, after years of negotiations in Western Australia with indigenous landowners and the Labor government failed to provide a site.