

Barnett's Kimberley plan slammed

- **Chalpat Sonti**
- December 12, 2008 - 6:06AM

Environmental groups have slammed Premier Colin Barnett's plan to compulsorily buy land for the Kimberley LNG hub.

The Australian Conservation Foundation said the plan was "authoritarian" and "out of touch with modern Australian values", while the Greens accused Mr Barnett of "trampling on Aboriginal rights" and called on Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett to intervene.

Mr Barnett said on Wednesday that the Government would buy the land if indigenous owners could not reach agreement among themselves to sell it.

The preferred site for the hub is expected to be known by Christmas, with North Head and James Price Point the contenders. Mr Barnett favours North Head.

He will use the Public Works Act to buy the land if there is no quick agreement from Aboriginal owners.

That approach came under fire from the Australian Conservation Foundation. Spokesman Justin McCaul said Mr Barnett's "authoritarian" tone was bad news for both indigenous owners and the Kimberley environment.

"Most Australians would have thought this sort of approach to Aboriginal land and the environment had been abandoned many decades ago," he said.

"By declaring his willingness to skip fair negotiations with Aboriginal people the Premier has shown a disregard for native title rights and is putting at risk the Kimberley's outstanding natural and cultural heritage."

Mr McCaul said it was important the federal government did not support Mr Barnett's approach, a view shared by the Greens.

WA Senator Rachel Siewert said Mr Garrett should not approve any LNG developments in the Kimberley outside of the agreed process.

The federal government must also sign off on any site and would be "forced to intervene" if Mr Barnett "cut corners" and compulsorily bought the land, she said.

"The world has moved on and there is a process already under way to find the best place to co-locate industries in the Kimberley and deliver a better outcome for all players involved."

