

EPA snubs Premier's choice for LNG hub

19-December-08 by Rebecca Lawson

The state environment watchdog has rejected Premier Colin Barnett's preferred location for a liquefied natural gas hub in the Kimberley, saying nearby settlements are likely to be affected by emissions.

The Environmental Protection Authority today released its advice for a multi-user LNG processing precinct that will process gas from the Browse Basin.

Four sites were shortlisted by the state government and the Kimberley Land Council, which represented the traditional land owners, with Anjo Peninsula, Gourdon Bay, James Price Point and North Head named as suitable areas.

Premier Colin Barnett had previously named North Head as his preferred location.

Today the EPA recommended Gourdon Bay, south of Broome, and James Price Point, north of Broome on the Dampier Peninsula, as the two sites where environmental risks and impacts are likely to be manageable.

"The other two sites, North Head and Anjo Peninsula are not considered suitable for large scale industrial development from an environmental point of view, Anjo peninsula also has wilderness values that would be threatened," EPA chairman Paul Vogel said.

'North Head has nearby settlements likely to be affected by emissions and whale calving and resting grounds immediately offshore.

'In formulating the report the EPA has taken into account advice on the size of precinct that may be needed as, once established, the site is likely to attract further large proposals in the future.

'For James Price Point the risk of future expansion being significantly constrained is likely to be low, at Gourdon Bay future expansion may be limited by the frontage available with direct access to deep water if the precinct is laid out with jetties south of Cape Latouche Tréville."

Dr Vogel stressed that Gourdon Bay and James Price Point have not been subject to formal environmental assessment.

A formal environmental assessment of a strategic proposal will be undertaken to fulfil this requirement for whichever site is chosen, Dr Vogel said.

Yesterday, Mr Barnett said a decision on the site will be made before Christmas with a meeting with the KLC scheduled later for this week, depending on cyclone activity.

The Premier also did not rule out compulsory land acquisition for the LNG hub development.

"...without being dramatic, if this land is not secured by the State and then available to be leased out to proponents of LNG, then there will be no LNG project in the Kimberley and there will be no benefits for the Aboriginal people of the Kimberley, and there will be no benefits for the wider economy of the Kimberley, and that's the bottom line," Mr Barnett said.

"One project's been lost, I don't intend to see a second one being lost."

In September, Inpex chose the Northern Territory ahead of WA for the construction of an LNG facility for its Ichthys project.

Woodside Petroleum is evaluating potential sites for its Browse Basin project, with the LNG hub as one option. The company is also evaluating the option to process the gas at its North West Shelf operation or its Pluto LNG project.

The EPA announcement is pasted below:

The Environmental Protection Authority has released early environmental advice on the Western Australian Government's site evaluation process for a multi-user liquefied natural gas processing precinct to process gas resources from the Browse Basin on the Kimberley coast.

EPA Chairman Paul Vogel said that, based on available data, of the four sites under consideration environmental risks and impacts are likely to be manageable at two sites, Gourdon Bay south of Broome and James Price Point north of Broome on the Dampier Peninsula.

"The other two sites, North Head and Anjo Peninsula are not considered suitable for large scale industrial development from an environmental point of view, Anjo peninsula also has wilderness values that would be threatened," Dr Vogel said.

'North Head has nearby settlements likely to be affected by emissions and whale calving and resting grounds immediately offshore.

'In formulating the report the EPA has taken into account advice on the size of precinct that may be needed as, once established, the site is likely to attract further

large proposals in the future.

'For James Price Point the risk of future expansion being significantly constrained is likely to be low, at Gourdon Bay future expansion may be limited by the frontage available with direct access to deep water if the precinct is laid out with jetties south of Cape Latouche Treville.

'The EPA also strongly supports evaluation of the national heritage values of the Kimberley with a view to conserving and protecting significant, representative marine and terrestrial areas and determining opportunities for joint management between Government and traditional owners; it is important that this is done in parallel with the LNG precinct assessment process.

'There are also a number of important issues that have been raised through the site evaluation process and the public submissions period which are best addressed by other government agencies; issues in relation to the downstream planning and infrastructure needs of the precinct, pressures on the coastal environment from an influx of people and socio-economic impacts.'

The sites examined in the EPA's report have not been subject to formal environmental assessment. A formal environmental assessment of a strategic proposal will be undertaken to fulfil this requirement for whichever site is chosen. Future proposals which are brought forward and which fit within the assessed strategic proposal, known as derived proposals, will not generally be subject to further assessment by the EPA.

'Any additional developments requiring an increase in the overall footprint of an approved precinct would be subject to further comprehensive environmental assessment at the time, particularly in terms of cumulative impacts,' Dr Vogel said.