

Joint inquiry launched into Varanus Island

Wednesday, 24 December 2008

THE federal and Western Australian governments have launched a joint inquiry into the Varanus Island gas disaster that slashed WA's gas supplies by about 30%.

The inquiry will focus on the effectiveness of the regulatory system and the regulators for upstream petroleum operations and recommend improvements to the existing system.

It will also look into the occupational health and safety regime at the Varanus Island facility at the time of the explosion and consider its implications for the resource sector in Western Australia and other state and territory jurisdictions.

The inquiry expert panel will report its findings by April 2009.



Varanus Island,
Carnarvon Basin, WA.

"The gas pipeline explosion at Varanus Island on June 3, 2008 has raised questions about the effectiveness of the current regulatory system and the implications this may have for occupational health and safety," WA Premier Colin Barnett said.

"The previous inquiry was limited in scope to the immediate physical causes of the pipeline explosion. It did not investigate other issues which need to be addressed to ensure WA is not again faced with a shortage of gas should such an incident re-occur.

"There is a clear need for a further inquiry to look at the regulators and regulatory system and see what part, if any, they played in the Varanus incident and to identify ways in which any future crisis can be avoided or at least handled more effectively."

He said a joint investigation was needed due to the complex nature of the relationship between the WA Industry and Resources Department and the National Offshore Petroleum Safety Authority in regulating the Varanus Island facility.

The inquiry is expected to be led by a two-member expert panel jointly appointed by WA Mines and Petroleum Minister Norman Moore and federal Resources and Energy Minister Martin Ferguson.

Barnett predicted the panel members would be highly qualified in safety regulation theory and experienced in the area of petroleum-pipeline safety.