

WA gas hub proposal has environmentalists concerned

Posted Wed Dec 24, 2008 2:15pm AEDT

Environmental groups are preparing an international campaign to try to stop a natural gas hub being established in the Kimberley.

The Western Australian Government has chosen James Price Point, 60 kilometres from Broome, as the site to process gas from the Browse Basin offshore.

The State Government has given Indigenous people three months to reach an agreement for secure title or it will resume the land.



Protesters say the location of the gas hub, James Price Point, is a breeding ground for whales. (ABC)

WA Premier Colin Barnett says the Browse Basin gas projects are too important to delay.

"These are the biggest industries in the land," he said.

"There is nothing else in Australia that comes close to the size, scale and value of these projects."

Mr Barnett has said compulsory acquisition of the land is an option if agreement cannot be reached with Indigenous people.

He says processing of Browse gas in the Kimberley would provide economic opportunities.

"I don't accept the argument that there can be no economic development in the Kimberley at all because people who will advocate that cannot look me in the face and tell me where they will find the opportunities for Indigenous people," he said.

"And there is basically extremely high levels of unemployment, a whole range of social and other issues.

"I am not suggesting an LNG [liquefied natural gas] plant is a solution to that, but it might be part of the solution."

The Federal Government says it will do everything possible to help facilitate the exploitation of Browse gas.

Federal Resources Minister Martin Ferguson says the Commonwealth actually asked WA for a timeline.

"These issues have to be pushed along. Time is not on our side," he said.

"Australia is an attractive site for the purposes of the development of the LNG industry and so are a lot of other sites throughout the world.

"We have to compete in a global market in a very tough economic situation to actually attract investment and the Browse LNG province is very important to Australia's future, in terms of the development of the LNG industry."

'Negotiation at gunpoint'

The executive director of the Kimberley Land Council says he is very disappointed by the threat of compulsory acquisition.

Wayne Bergmann says the timeline puts a lot of pressure on negotiations.

"It's sort of like negotiating with a gun to your head," he said.

"These sorts of things and these sort of processes happened in the old days when Aboriginal people were marginalised and bulldozed for the sake of big business.

"Compulsory acquisition will just shore up the profits of big companies."

Environment groups say companies should not be encouraged to process gas in the Kimberley region at all.

The Conservation Council's Piers Verstegen says they should be taking Browse gas to the Pilbara instead.

"There are already industrialised areas in the Pilbara and the Pilbara is a far better option to sacrificing pristine nature and values of the Kimberley with LNG development," he said.

Mr Verstegen says the Conservation Council wants to work with other environment groups to start an international campaign against the proposal.

"The whole Kimberley coast is like West Australia's Great Barrier Reef and they're both of equal worth and significance in terms of the tourist potential of those areas," he said.

"It would be unimaginable to put an industrial facility on the Great Barrier Reef, yet somehow Colin Barnett thinks it's OK to trash West Australia's Kimberley coastline."

Based on a report by David Weber for AM, December 24, 2008.