

Barnett to push ahead with gas hub plan

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Colin Barnett has rejected calls to stop development of a gas processing hub in the Kimberley, saying the State Government's preferred site at James Price Point was the best compromise between economic development and environmental concerns.

Environmental groups have warned a project on the site would threaten whale breeding grounds and open the door to the industrialisation of the whole Kimberley.

But the Premier said yesterday James Price Point, 60km north of Broome, was an ideal site because of its isolation.

"That peninsular area is some 200km long — it is basically flat tableland that simply comes to the coast," he said.

"It's an isolated site with no communities in the vicinity and I believe it would bring immense benefits to the Kimberley in terms of employment and small business opportunities in particular for the indigenous population of the area.

"While I recognise there will be groups, particularly the environmental lobby, which will oppose any development anywhere, James Price Point is not that part of the coast that people identify as being the Kimberley. This is not the spectacular gorge country with waterfalls and the like."

Environs Kimberley director Martin Pritchard said yesterday an LNG hub at James Price Point would disrupt the migratory patterns of humpback whales.

"The deep sea area at James Price Point is 5km offshore, so they are going to have to dredge and build a huge breakwater, possibly up to 5km out to sea," he said. "That is going to mean utter devastation for the marine ecology in that area."

Mr Pritchard said he would prefer gas to be piped to the existing LNG hub in the Pilbara or processed on a floating platform.

Mr Barnett said while technically feasible, a floating LNG processing platform would probably be built in South Korea, negating any benefit to the local economy.

He promised a full environmental assessment and was confident negotiations with indigenous groups would be successful, given talks he had with community members when he visited the area two weeks ago.

Shadow minister for State development Mark McGowan accused the Premier of attempting to force a decision rather than build a consensus for a preferred site

among the Kimberley community. He said this could jeopardise development in the region.

PETER KERR