

Tiny isle may be key to N-W riches

By Lloyd Marshall

DEEP PORT FOR £250,000

EMPHASIS has swung from Port Hedland to Depuch Island as the mineral outlet for the Pilbara.

And moves are already afoot that could make Depuch the deepwater treasure-island storehouse of the Pilbara base metal riches.

Indications are that the big companies interested in Pilbara minerals are eyeing Dupuch very keenly.

The island lies 55 miles south-west of Port Hed

land and 35 miles north-east of Roebourne.

It is separated from the mainland by less than two miles of water, average depth six feet and at low tide some of the intervening sandbanks are four feet above water.

On the north-east side of the island, 350 yards off-shore, there is 37 feet of water at low tide enough to float a 10,000-ton ore carrier. Seven hundred yards out the water is 60 feet deep enough to float a 40,000-ton ore carrier at low tide.

Some dredging of a bank further out would be necessary to navigate a 40,000 ton ore carrier at low tide.

The island is basalt. It is covered with spinifex and has areas of small gumtrees. There is fresh water available though the quantity is probably not great. It has a number of hills with spot heights 520, 480, 476 and 450 feet.

Abundant fresh water is available from the mainland.

The most important thing about Depuch is that the famous London

shipping market, the Baltic Mercantile and Shipping Exchange, has approved the sheltered Depuch anchorage for navigation of ships up to 10,000 tons.

How would the island be developed?

The first step would be to connect Depuch with the mainland by laying a causeway across the shallows, using the island's basalt.

A road would then be run from the causeway to the anchorage shore on Depuch. From here contractors would run out into the anchorage a solid pier of basalt.

The hole at the quarry site would then be used as storage bins. The island is not big about two miles by three miles. Estimated cost for this port project is little

more than £250,000 for 10,000-ton ships.

Estimated cost of converting Port Hedland to 10,000-tonner standard is about £4,000,000. Port Hedland could never accommodate 40,000-ton ore carriers. Depuch could.

Only by bulk export can Pilbara minerals become a truly economic proposition. This makes a deep-water port the key.

The Pilbara hinterland has manganese, copper, vanadium and an expanding blue asbestos industry. Above all, it has iron ore.

This must be handled in huge bulk to be economic.

So aircraft have been flying over Depuch scouting it out, photographing.

More moves are expected.

