

Legal threat over gas islands

By STEVEN HOUNSOME

SAVE the Kimberley campaigners have backed one of the nine potential sites for an LNG processing hub identified by the Northern Development Taskforce in its interim report, describing it as "the best of the evils".

Gourdon Bay, 160km south of Broome, falls in line with what STK stands for, vice-chairman Kevin Blatchford said.

"We don't think it's the best option, we'd still rather see it in the Pilbara or floating offshore, but of what they've listed it's the best," he said.

Although just over 500km from the Ichthys gas fields, dredging of shoal banks would probably be required, along with a 3.5km jetty and long breakwater.

Other sites still being considered are Quondong Point, James Price Point, North Head, Perpendicular Head and Packer Island – all on the Dampier Peninsula – Koolan Island, Wilson Point and the Maret Islands.

Mr Blatchford said he would never support development at the

Maret Islands, which was being proposed by Japanese firm Inpex.

"If they go ahead with it, it will be one of the biggest environmental battles this country has ever seen," he said.

He said the group may pursue legal action against Inpex if processing on the Maret Islands looked like going ahead.

STK chairman Peter Tucker described the Marets proposal as "ill-conceived and fatally flawed from its inception".

"We will not stand by and watch the region stripped, pillaged and ultimately discarded in the same way the Pilbara region has been," Mr Tucker said.

Inpex external affairs manager Sean Kildare said the company was reviewing the interim report.

"We are interested to note the Maret Islands is one of the sites still being looked at," he said.

While Inpex had not ruled out operating from a hub, the company would prefer an independent site

and was also considering options in Darwin.

Mr Kildare said there would be a decision by the end of the year.

A Woodside spokesman said the company supported the sites listed but was still considering processing on the Burrup Peninsula in the Pilbara.

The company declined to nominate a preference for any of the nine sites and said a decision would be reached by the end of September.

Broome Shire president Graeme Campbell said all sites, of which five fell within Shire boundaries, were of some concern.

"What concerns me mainly is the social impact, it could severely change the way Broome is," he said.

"If there's a huge demand for accommodation, prices will go up and there'll be a whole raft of infrastructure needed. Whatever they choose they need to take that into account."



PRISTINE: Save the Kimberley is threatening a legal fight if gas is processed on the Maret Islands. **PICTURE:** HUGH BROWN.