

Pearl industry raises worries

By STEVEN HOUNSOME

A KEY representative of the pearling industry has expressed concern with the shortlist of LNG processing sites announced by the Northern Development Taskforce, citing the risk of introduced diseases as a significant threat to the industry.

Pearl Producers Association executive officer Brett McCallum said a preferred site would be in Darwin or on the Burrup Peninsula or Scott Reef, well away from the Kimberley and important pearling grounds.

“We don’t want existing pearling areas impacted or our ability to expand limited,” he said.

“We’re very concerned with the shortlist – Gourdon Bay and Quondong Point both have established farming operations.”

Mr McCallum expressed concern that infrastructure brought in for LNG processing could introduce marine pests, threatening the “pristine water quality (which) produces the highest quality grade pearls”.

“We’ve had discussions with Inpex and Woodside and they understand our concerns, which we share with fishing and charter operators,” he said.

He called for careful management of ballast water in LNG ships and cleaning of bilges and pipework on ships, barges and rigs prior to entering Australian waters.

“Imported marine pests are a major factor in many ports around the world and in other parts of Australia which thankfully the Kimberley has avoided to date,” he said.

The pearling industry has been closely involved in the NDT’s consultative process and Mr McCallum said the two industries could co-exist, but due recognition must be given to pearling’s 150 years of continuous operation in the region.