

Barnett's LNG hub hits hurdle

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Colin Barnett's plan to develop an LNG precinct on the Kimberley coast faces uncertainty, with Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett saying yesterday that a strategic assessment of the region also would consider other areas including the Pilbara.

Conservationists have said they would lobby the Federal and State governments to build the processing facility in the already industrialised Pilbara, rather than the environmentally sensitive Kimberley.

A spokesman for Mr Garrett said the strategic assessment process, announced in February, required consideration of processing options outside the Kimberley.

The West Australian understands that if the environmental impacts of building a hub in the Kimberley were deemed too great then it could be put elsewhere.

The Premier this week released a report shortlisting four possible sites in the Kimberley. Mr Barnett said he preferred North Head, 26km north of Beagle Bay.

Conservation Council of WA director Piers Versteegen said Inpex's decision to pipe gas more than 800km to Darwin proved it was economically feasible to build pipelines from the Browse Basin to the north Pilbara, which already had heavy industry and would be a better location. Mr Barnett's preferred site of North Head not only threatened whale sanctuaries, it also could jeopardise the public consultation process, he said.

World Wildlife Fund Australia spokesman Paul Gamblin said he was glad the assessment required consideration of options outside the Kimberley.

He said WWF would not take an automatic position that the Pilbara was a better site for the hub because it needed to see the analysis on the different options, including the impact on Aboriginal rock art of putting the hub on the Burrup Peninsula. He raised the prospect of building the hub in Darwin.