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BARTLETT

Well, let's talk about what's happening up in the Pilbara. The State Government is hoping that a \$27million package will seal a native title deal in the Pilbara with three Aboriginal groups and thereby clear the way for \$6billion worth of industrial development on the Burrup Peninsula. There are some who are very unhappy at the way the deal has been put together though. That seems to be a large sticking point this morning.

Now the package that the State Government have constructed is reported to offer freehold title over almost the entire northern half of the Burrup Peninsular, about \$7million worth of infrastructure help and an up-front payment of 1.5million, and ownership of five percent of the lots in Karratha's residential and commercial land, when they eventually are released for sale.

That offer's been made to, as I say, three Aboriginal groups and their...the exact response from those groups at this stage is uncertain. Two of them are at the moment are involved in, you know, a federal court action over the native title claim. The third one at this stage is on the outer, but the Government say if this deal is to work and a package is to be accepted, it must be accepted by all three Aboriginal groups.

Now joining us here in the studio this morning is ABC's number one rural reporter Russel WOOLF, who has been across this story for quite a long time... obviously Russell...I mean, you talk to these resource companies all day, every day. What do you think they...their interpretation of it will be?

WOOLF

Well, look I suppose... they're not going to mind as long as they get their projects up an running, that's probably the critical thing from the companies' point of view.

There are other concerns I suppose, that the Burrup Peninsula, if you're not familiar with it, I mean it is only a very limited tract of land, it's a finger shaped point off the North West cape...of the North West coast near Dampier. But it does already house some enormous projects, this of course is where the North West Shelf has its onshore LNG project, \$12billion worth of infrastructure gone into that, there. There are port facilities there, there are of course, other projects that have been earmarked for development on the Burrup Peninsula. But the issue I think that is most critical is that there's probably just not room on the Burrup Peninsula to...you know, looking forward to house or home

all of these projects that are under consideration at the moment.

BARTLETT

What, for infill, do you mean? For infill industrial development?

WOOLF

That's right, and I mean, look, it's a beautiful area; it has in it, an area of magnificent rock engravings that date back thousands of years, and there are in fact thousands of them and they are truly remarkable to have a look at.

For the people in the surrounding district in both Dampier and Karratha, it has a beach called Hearson's Cove which is in fact one of the nicest, easily accessible beach in that region. And the Shire of Roebourne already has accepted the development of one project very close to Hearson's Cove that will limit access for a period there, but I expect the Shire of Roebourne probably is not too keen to see, four, five, six, seven major projects developed, and really what this seems to signal today, the announcement today by the State Government, is that they're probably avoiding contact to a large degree with the Shire of Roebourne and just giving the green light to these companies, ultimately to develop their projects on the Burrup Peninsula and to get...you know, to hand over the rights as far as the land is concerned to these three Aboriginal groups at the same time.

BARTLETT

Alright, well let's get some direct reaction on that. Kevin Richards joins us, the president of the Shire of Roebourne... (greetings not transcribed) Kevin have you been intimately associated with the Government through these negotiations, you know, while this deal has been put together?

RICHARDS

No, no what actually happened Liam, we ..talking about there about Hearson's Cove, Methanex are building their plant right near it, so the shire is saying well, we'll have to look a bit further afield for recreational areas. Now the area we've always looked at is this northern part of the Burrup to... there's a very nice beach and a bay out there called Conzinc Bay, which is equal to anything that Broome's got to offer and so, that was our idea of doing this. And we were actually in the process of doing it when we actually came across the... we thwarted the plans a bit of what the State Government was doing. It was just purely an accident that we decided there's an area out there called the Jump-up and we decided to make the Jump-up safer to tourists and people to access that part of the land. And it was in.. actually publicising what we were going to do that we actually went across this sort of hidden agreements that we knew nothing about. And that's what's fleshed it out into the open.

BARTLETT

So what effect would it have if the State Government went ahead with their deal and gave, as part of the package, gave the entire northern half of the Burrup freehold title to

Aboriginal groups?

RICHARDS

Well we believe that you know, the people who live up here, we should have some say in what's going to happen in the ultimate development of that area as well. And to virtually give it freehold to, you know, the Aboriginal claimants who, by the way are all very nice fellows and members of our shire, but it's... you know, without having a management plan and access and all these in place beforehand, I think's a recipe for disaster.

WOOLF

Kevin it's Russell here. Look, obviously the Shire of Roebourne is quite used to dealing with big infrastructure and with resource developments with some of the most... the largest projects, I suppose, housed in your region. So I guess as a... the shire is pro-development to a degree but...

RICHARDS

...Oh but exactly. What we were trying to do was actually move some of the recreational area out of where Methanex was going, to ease Methanex in. You know, like the shire has always been pro-development and in doing this we were looking to this other area because once Methanex is built, you can just about kiss Hearson's Cove goodbye, which is one of our great tourist attractions up here. And what we were trying to do was develop another recreational area away from this area to allow these to actually take place. So we're not anti, we're the most proactive shire in Australia I'd say, when it comes to development, as you well know living here Russell.

WOOLF

Indeed and I suppose development is king and if there isn't room to do it on the Burrup Peninsula, what would the Shire of Roebourne like to see set up as far as an estate perhaps to house these new developments?

RICHARDS

Well the Maitland heavy duty estate was always set up with this idea in mind. The trouble is it needs a fair bit of infrastructure and I think the State Government wants to get their royalties out from these people without putting any infrastructure money in. Now they're locking all these people into a small little corridor where expansion in the future will be just nigh on impossible. Now the Maitland estate was set up for the very reason of sort of rationalising the area, again Russell you know as much about that as I do, and that was what the idea was. Now we want to see a bit more effort done in infrastructure and development of the Maitland estate which could take 20 of these size developments, but we're packing them all into one very small area of great significance in heritage and environment and a whole lot of things. Now...

BARTLETT

...Kevin, what about the other side of this argument because it was brought up in parliament last night by Greens MP Robin Chapple, that even the Aboriginal groups in this are feeling railroaded. And I'll just read you very quickly from the parliamentary Hansard last night. He says, and I quote *'I've been approached by three claimant groups, - okay, the three claimant groups the State Government's talking about - who are becoming increasingly concerned they are being forced into a negotiated position with the Government over the Burrup Peninsula when, in fact, all they want to do is retain, manage and care for their rock art'*.

RICHARDS

Yeah well that would be correct, I mean the Burrup, by the way, getting to that thing, it's the greatest open air art exhibition in the world and its full potential has never ever been tapped.

BARTLETT

But if what he's saying is right, what's the Government doing offering a \$27million package to groups to look after rock art, that's essentially what we're talking about?

RICHARDS

I think there's a great degree of expediency here which I can't quite follow at the moment, but I agree with you. I mean they're saying if the three don't sign, then the deal's off. Now that sounds like some sort of threatening gesture to the three claimants in a way. You know if you read actually their press release in the front of *The West* this morning, that's exactly what it says. It says if one group doesn't play ball then the deal is off. Yes it's definitely a... it's definitely been borne out of enormous amount of haste with no consultation of the local people or the shire whatsoever.

BARTLETT

So you wouldn't describe it as a consultative process?

RICHARDS

No. It'd be like you waking up one morning down there and found out that King's Park's been sold. That's about as close an analogy as I can get to it. It's like finding out one day that City Beach is no longer there for the people of City Beach and they have no alternative beach. That's exactly what it's like.

BARTLETT

Alright, Kevin, thanks for your time this morning. ... Kevin Richards, president of the Shire of Roebourne.

And Russell the Treasurer Eric Ripper, has called the program, he wants to have a say on this. ... Doesn't sound too good does it?

RIPPER

Well the time lines are not of our making Liam. The time lines are those of the project proponents and the state is in a difficult position. If we want these projects, and we do, \$6billion worth of investment, very important to the economy and prosperity of both the Pilbara and the whole state – then we've got to be able to deliver access to the land within the time project... time lines set by the proponents. We've inherited this situation.

The discussions were ongoing in 2000, but it's something where the project proponents are saying to us, if we can't have the land by this date, maybe we can't have the project.

WOOLF

Treasurer, I wonder what sort of money has been set aside as far as setting up infrastructure on the Burrup Peninsula is concerned for the six projects?

RIPPER

Yes, we've set aside about 136million for common user infrastructure to support the projects, that's infrastructure in ports, roads and water supply. And if we were to go to the Maitland estate, the infrastructure requirement would be about \$300million, so you can see why the Burrup is the preference rather than the Maitland estate.

WOOLF

The Federal Government has also kicked in about \$80million worth of infrastructure, hasn't it?

RIPPER

Yes they've provided support to Methanex and I'm not sure of the total of Commonwealth support, I've more been focused on what we've got to find in the State Treasury.

WOOLF

Fair enough, but if you look at though, that's probably two-thirds of the way towards the infrastructure required to set up a whole new estate that will lock in plenty of future opportunities, I suppose, as the further development of resources projects take off in Western Australia.

RIPPER

What's happened is that this has tended to grow incrementally. The Syntroleum project was the first one that was considered for this area and naturally we looked at the most economic way or the previous government looked at the most economic way to get the Syntroleum project up. And then, of course, others came along and were interested as well.

BARTLETT

Is it the most economic Treasurer, or the greatest shortcut?

RIPPER

Well, it's very difficult to find \$136million, given the capital and budget constraints on the state. You know that's a very significant commitment that we've made.

BARTLETT

Yeah but are we cutting off our nose for the short-term gain, because you know, here we have a situation where the shire is saying well you haven't talked to us about it and you're not taking a long-term view, and the other people, the claimants, the three Aboriginal groups, appear to be also saying we've been railroaded?

RIPPER

Well the time lines have been set by the project proponents. In an ideal world you'd like to handle this at a much steadier pace and with the native title negotiations concluded well in advance of project deadlines, but that's not the situation that we've inherited.

And look, I just need to make a few comments about a couple of other things. It's never been contemplated that the public won't have access to some of these key areas. What we're talking about is a conditional form of title, co-management between indigenous interests and CALM to protect the very significant rock art there, to protect the conservation values. I think it'll be win/win for everyone. We'll get the prosperity arising out of the projects, or at least create the conditions for that. We'll get infrastructure investment, which will open up some of that Burrup land that people are interested in visiting...

BARTLETT

Yeah but what about the locals?

RIPPER

What I'm saying is, I think the locals are going to get some advantage out of this native title arrangement that's being proposed.

BARTLETT

From what - what, a bigger airport 'cause there's going to be more people flying in and flying out? No-one's going to want to go to a beach surrounded by industrial plants are they?

RIPPER

No, no. What's proposed is a form of co-management over that heritage and conservation land on the Burrup Peninsula, which will be supported by infrastructure investment, which will open it up for indigenous people, but also open it up for other

residents. So basically people are going to get access to areas that they can't get access to now and it's not as if we're doing something that's totally different from what would have occurred anyway, because this is conservation land and there have to be certain limitations on what people can do when there's highly sensitive conservation areas.

WOOLF

Treasurer, really the Burrup Peninsula, when you use the word limitations, I think is probably a striking example of it because there certainly isn't a lot of space there and if we are looking towards development in the future it just seems a little bit narrow-sighted, if you will, that the Government can't find an extra \$100million when we're talking about the development on the cards at the moment of \$6billion - \$6,000million - worth of projects that will open up a new area that will have unlimited access in the future and for future generations, leaving the Burrup Peninsula as it is at the moment, seeing as there doesn't seem to be any problems there.

RIPPER

Well you've got to take your opportunities for projects when they come along and you've got to struggle to find the monies within the capital constraints confronting the states. What we've got is a very significant opportunity for Western Australia's economic development, we don't want to pass it up. We will also have out of this hopefully, tourism opportunities for indigenous businesses because one of the proposals is for an indigenous cultural centre. The co-management of the heritage and conservation land on the Burrup will provide opportunities for tourism associated with those heritage and conservation values.

This native title claim... these native title claims over these areas have been in existence since '94/95. Now it would have been good if the previous government had actually done some of the work to prepare for this likelihood of industrial development. We've inherited a situation and we're trying to get the projects, get the prosperity, get the investment, get the jobs, and at the same time recognise traditional owner interests and make sure that the residents of Karratha and the region also have their go.

BARTLETT

Well we'll have to leave it there Treasurer, thanks for your time this morning. Treasurer Eric Ripper on the program. So what do you think in the end, is it a political solution rather than a practical solution?

WOOLF

Well it's interesting – if you look at the politics of it, the local member up there is Fred Riebeling, the Speaker of the House, and I'm not sure if he's had too much to say at the moment, he'd be a little bit concerned I imagine when he gets back to his parliamentary office in Karratha, he'll have a few phone calls to return.

Interesting also we heard from Kevin Richards, who is the shire president but it's no secret, public information, that he's also president of the local Labor Party, a chapter up

there. So this cuts across political boundaries in many ways. It's hard to argue that the Government's being pushed by big developers. I think perhaps the Government holds the whip hand there. And they talked about a project called Syntroleum, which has plans to build a gas to liquids plant on the Burrup Peninsula. Now that's been due to start for every day over the last three years...

BARTLETT

...For a long time, yeah.

WOOLF

....you know, as I say, I mean historically and always I think you'll find these big projects don't get developed on time. How many times do we see the time lines blow out? So I don't see that as being a huge point. I don't think they're being pushed too hard by the project developers. I imagine, if we were to speak to the project developers, they probably wouldn't care where they went, they want to see their projects get up and running, but if it was on the Burrup Peninsula or if it was on Maitland estate, I think would make diddly squat difference to them as long as they can get about doing their jobs.

BARTLETT

Makes sense, as long as they can get on with it. Russell, thanks for sharing some of your knowledge with us about that particular area and that industry..
ENDS..ls