

Firms stick with Burrup

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RESOURCE companies queuing up to establish themselves on the Burrup Peninsula have rejected the prospect of a move to the nearby Maitland industrial estate

Resources giants Methanex, Japan DME and Plenty River Corporation, who along with British-based GTL are awaiting environmental approval to establish operations on the Burrup, all told The West Australian yesterday that they did not consider Maitland a viable site for their combined \$3.9 billion of investments.

The State Government is coming under increasing pressure to move the projects away from the Burrup, home to the world's biggest collection of ancient Aboriginal rock art and containing the most popular recreational beach in the area.

Two projects - Burrup Fertilisers and Syntroleum - have already got approval from the Environmental Protection Authority to operate there.

The deputy project developer for chemical company Plenty River, Greg Kukla, said his company had examined the Maitland site, 20km south-west of Karratha, and it was not a suitable area from which to transport urea produced by the plant to Dampier port.

Japan DME project coordinator Kevin Vaz declined to comment on whether the company would move to the Maitland estate if it was its only option in the area.

However, he said Japan DME had a strong preference for Burrup.

A spokeswoman for Methanex said Maitland offered too much uncertainty for its proposed construction start-up in March 2003 and would not be entertained by the company.

The comments appear to reinforce the Government's claim that any forced move to Maitland would cost the State billions in investment.

However, conservationists claimed yesterday that the companies would stay in the State if the Government was prepared to "call their bluff" and force them to Maitland.

"The Government needs to draw a line in the sand and say that the Burrup is worth saving," WA Conservation Council coordinator Rachel Siewert said.

Opposition Leader Colin Barnett said having six gas processing plants crammed cheek to jowl was not acceptable from an environmental or operational safety point of view.

He said long-term planning demanded the development of the Maitland estate.

Roebourne Shire president Kevin Richards dismissed any suggestion that the companies should be asked or made to move elsewhere.

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