



Conservation organisations welcome joint statement with KLC on gas development in the Kimberley – 6th December 2007

Together with the Kimberley Land Council (KLC), five major conservation organisations have signed a joint statement calling for environmental, cultural and social considerations to guide any gas development in the Kimberley.

Environs Kimberley Director, Maria Mann said that it was very important to conservation groups that any development of the Kimberley was both environmentally sustainable and provided real long-term benefits to Indigenous communities.

“Too often, large-scale developments of the kind now being proposed are allowed to proceed with minimal, if any, benefit to local Indigenous communities, many of which are severely disadvantaged.

“At the same time, we are strongly opposed to any plans for multiple gas developments (e.g. LNG processing plants) along the beautiful and unspoiled Kimberley coast and are extremely concerned about the current Inpex proposal for an LNG development on the magnificent Maret Islands,” said Ms Mann.

WWF-Australia Policy Advisor, Paul Gamblin said the joint statement highlights the need for comprehensive assessments of the values of the region - and the potential cumulative impacts of development - to be conducted prior to any decisions by government on industrial proposals.

“We call on the Western Australian and Commonwealth Governments to immediately commence the necessary detailed scientific and cultural assessments and then ensure the Northern Development Taskforce – set up by the WA Government to steer gas development - focuses its attention on carefully locating a site for a gas processing hub. A hub would provide for maximum sharing of infrastructure, minimize the overall environmental ‘footprint’ of development and provide for real benefits for Indigenous communities,” said Mr Gamblin.

Wilderness Society WA State Coordinator, Peter Robertson said that conservation groups will continue to campaign strongly for any development to be limited to a single hub.

“We will explore options for that hub to be located outside the Kimberley if this can be done without adversely affecting economic benefits to Kimberley Indigenous communities. Certainly, any hub must not be located in the heart of extremely sensitive Kimberley coastal and island environments,” said Mr Robertson.

Conservation Council of WA Director Chris Tallentire said the statement’s call for broad-scale protection of the Kimberley’s outstanding environmental and cultural values was an essential underpinning of any development of the region and had been promised by successive governments for many years.

“It’s time for governments to stop mouthing the words about how special the Kimberley is and get on with the job of protecting and managing the region’s environmental values that are under increasing threat,” he said.

Australian Conservation Foundation Executive Director, Don Henry said that all conservation groups want to stress the importance of informed consent to the proponents of LNG development off the Kimberley coastline.

“Information about the scope of the proposed projects and their potential cumulative impacts on cultural and natural values must be made available to both the Traditional Owners in the effected areas, and the wider community,” said Mr Henry.

“There is no doubt that if an LNG industry establishes itself in the Kimberley it will have long-lasting impacts on the natural environment, and the social and cultural fabric of the Kimberley region. The availability of detailed information in relation to the impacts of any development options will be critical in supporting Indigenous communities to make a considered and informed response.”

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Copies of joint statement are available upon request.