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Joint venture partners take huge investment and environmental risk on Kimberley Whale Coast

The decision by Woodside and its Joint Venture partners to pursue a gas processing precinct on the Kimberley coast is a huge risk to investors and the world-class environmental values in the Kimberley said environment groups opposed to the project.

The project has many environmental and legal hurdles which include a decision by Federal Minister for the Environment Peter Garrett who could still reject the proposal in favor of piping to the Pilbara.

“The environmental assessment process that is required under state and commonwealth law has been severely compromised by governments recklessly rushing to see the royalties flowing from this project.” said Piers Verstegen Director of the Conservation Council of WA.

“We have seen firsthand how risky this industry is with the recent uncontrollable oil spill from the Montara well. This is not the sort of industry we should be locating in the middle of a world class pristine marine environment where humpback whales migrate to give birth.”

“The Commonwealth Government seem happy to grandstand about efforts to save humpback whales from Japanese harpoons, but they don’t seem willing to apply the same standards at home, where those same whales now face a severe threat from industrial development”

The establishment of a deep water port would require blasting of coral reefs and the clearing of 25 square kilometres would devastate remnant rainforests, which are a ‘threatened ecological community’ under state law.

“The Kimberley coastline is one of the last pristine areas left on earth, and James Price Point in particular is in the middle of a globally significant Humpback whale calving grounds, so if this proposal is allowed to proceed it will have a devastating impact on our environment.” said Environs Kimberley Director Martin Pritchard.

There is also considerable uncertainty regarding the project given that no environmental approvals have yet been granted, opening up the potential for legal challenge.

The Federal Government’s conditions on lease renewals for the Browse Basin gave the Joint Venture Partners no choice but to decide on James Price Point, but according to Commonwealth environmental laws the oil and gas companies must demonstrate how a gas plant in the Kimberley would have less impacts than the alternatives in the Pilbara.

The Wilderness Society spokesperson Josh Coates said “The process to date has failed to adequately assess gas processing options outside of the environmentally sensitive Kimberley coast despite this being a requirement under the joint state and commonwealth agreement regarding the LNG hub strategic assessment.”

“We can’t stand by and let our last remaining natural areas be destroyed by polluting heavy industry. Conservation groups will be looking at a range of actions to prevent this nightmare from becoming a reality in the Kimberley, including legal challenges if necessary.”

For further comment, contact:

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