



Save the Nature of the Kimberley

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Woodside gas plant disaster for fish marine wonderland in Kimberley – Government report

A report commissioned by the WA Government on the impacts of the proposed gas hub in the Kimberley makes it clear that the project is likely to have significant impacts on recreational and commercial fishing.

The *Fishing Industry Impact Study* has alarmed environmentalists and local fishers.

"This report is further evidence that the gas hub should not go ahead at James Price Point. Its findings will worry everyone who has an interest in fish in the Kimberley," said Environs Kimberley Director Martin Pritchard.

Serious concerns are raised in the report about the impacts of dredging, wharf construction and increased shipping, which would alter ocean currents and affect underwater habitat, fish movement and water quality.

The report states that proposed sites for an industrial port and wharves are close to '*...spectacular recreational fisheries for billfish and [an area that] attracts a wide range of other fish and marine animals, a prawn fishery and pearling.*'

Other potential problems mentioned in the report include the introduction of marine pests and disease, destruction of underwater habitat for the 3km-wide pipeline route, seismic testing disturbing fish, and a decline in commercial fisheries.

One commercial fisher believed that the proposed industrial port would be so large and damaging that it would 'turn the fish off' and that the pollution associated with so much dredging could have a serious impact on the distribution and availability of all pelagic species, especially the Spanish mackerel, and that the pollution plume would affect a wide area and interfere with the movement and migration of the fish.

'The dredging and blasting for a shipping channel and wharves would be harmful to fish; some species can be affected from seismic testing up to 100km away.' Mr Pritchard said.

Recreational fishing by oil and gas workers at the site is also likely to have a big impact on fish stocks.

"Oil and gas workers in the Kimberley are already estimated to be taking 200 tonnes of fish every year. Even if this is an inflated figure, the addition of 3,500 – 6,000 workers could devastate stocks here," Mr Pritchard said.

It is thought that huge baitfish aggregations (see map attached), which bring black marlin, billfish, Spanish mackerel, tuna, cobia and whaler sharks to waters just off the coast near the proposed gas plant, also attract humpback whales to the area. Fishers have described seeing four or five hundred dolphins as well as leatherback turtles, killer whales, white pointer sharks and whale sharks.

"We know this is a humpback whale calving ground and we now see how important it is for fish. Indeed, fishers describe these waters as a marine wonderland, why would you risk destroying this area when there are alternative sites for a gas plant?" Mr Pritchard said.

According to charter boat operators and recreational fishers, the fisheries near Dampier took 12 years to recover from their devastation by gas-related disturbances. A Broome tackle shop owner is concerned that a gas precinct would endanger the fishing tourism trade.

The pearling industry expects to be directly affected by sediment plumes from the extensive dredging that would be required for the port and shipping channel. The reduced water purity and elevated nutrient levels could cause long-term changes to the local ecosystem. Continuous dredging would be required because of the strong tidal flows and seasonal cyclone activity.

"Evidence of the environmental, social and economic impact of this proposal by Woodside, Chevron, BP, BHP and Shell shows that it is going to be a disaster for the Kimberley." said Mr Pritchard.

"The WA government has so far only painted a positive picture for this project, which is just the beginning of the industrialisation of the Kimberley, and its own studies are showing that it would have far-reaching environmental impacts.

"We are calling on recreational and commercial fishers, the pearling industry, tourism industry and other businesses that would be affected by this proposal to join us in making sure it doesn't go ahead. The Kimberley marine environment is far too precious to be destroyed by multi-national oil and gas companies for so little gain to the region." Mr Pritchard said.

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