



MEDIA RELEASE- Tuesday 1 September 2009

Kimberley whale survey shows highest numbers near proposed LNG hub

An aerial whale survey off the Kimberley coast has recorded the highest population numbers of Humpback Whales in the near vicinity of James Price Point - a site proposed for a massive industrial LNG gas processing facility.

The whale survey conducted on the weekend (29/30 August) with the assistance of Horizontal Falls Seaplane Adventures and The Wilderness Society recorded a staggering 162 Humpback whales in 102 separate pods between Gourdon Bay in the south to the Lacepede Islands in the north, with the highest concentration recorded in the vicinity of the proposed industrial site at James Price Point.

Local whale expert and organiser of the survey Mr. Richard Costin said "What we have seen in this single survey is just a snapshot of the number of whales that aggregate in this area to feed and give birth."

WA Premier Colin Barnett originally favoured North Head, a site further north on the Dampier peninsula, as the preferred site for LNG processing, however this site was abandoned to avoid the high whale populations in the area.

Mr Costin said "Based on our recent research, there is no doubt that the area around James Price Point is at least as significant for humpback whales as other sites that have been considered unsuitable for industrial development due to whale activity." He added.

"This whole region is important for these amazing creatures which would be severely impacted if the proposed LNG plant goes ahead on the Kimberley coast."

Also present in the plane for the survey were Martin Pritchard, Director of Environs Kimberley, and Piers Verstegen, Director, Conservation Council of Western Australia.

Mr Pritchard said "The survey indicated the world class marine biodiversity in the Kimberley, with Humpback whales, dolphins, dugong, sea turtles and sharks sighted from the survey plane, all in the vicinity of James Price Point."

Mr. Verstegen said, "These amazing and unique creatures are internationally significant and yet less than 1% of the Kimberley's waters are protected in marine sanctuaries."

Josh Coates, spokesperson for the Wilderness Society said "We are pleased to have supported this important survey, which highlights the need for the whole Kimberley coastline to be protected from the impacts of incompatible industrial development."

"We are inviting Prime Minister Rudd to take part in a similar whale survey in the James Price Point area while he is in Western Australia so that he can see for himself the incredible abundance of humpback whales and other marine life in this area."

Environment groups called on the State and Commonwealth Governments to immediately place a moratorium on oil and gas development on the Kimberley coast, and instead establish large marine sanctuary zones, with the consent of the Traditional Owners, to protect the globally significant marine biodiversity in this region, including Humpback whales in the vicinity of James Price Point.

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***Spectacular Film Footage and still photos available.**