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Woodside works 'illegal'

Woodside's drilling work at James Price Point in 2011 did not have Shire of Broome planning approval according to the minutes of a recent Shire meeting. The works included a laydown area with a fuel tank, transportable accommodation, offices, toilets, fences and gates, a vehicle washdown area and drilling.

Environs Kimberley Director Martin Pritchard said, "This is outrageous. Woodside had no legal clearances from the Shire to undertake this work, dozens of people were arrested and convicted of trying to stop work because they believed it was illegal and it seems those people have now been vindicated."

Woodside was originally granted approval from the Shire in September 2010 to develop certain facilities. However, according to the Shire they have been working on a different programme altogether, which does not have planning approval, and have not started on the developments that were approved.

"This begs the question, was Woodside ignorant of the fact that they needed planning approval for the work they did at James Price point in 2011, or did they decide to do the work and pay for the consequences later?" asked Mr Pritchard.

"This is clearly not an ethical way of going about business and Woodside must come clean on why they did the work without planning approval. The Shire also needs to explain what action they will take against this breach of the planning laws. You'd hope that the same laws apply to everyone, regardless of whether you're a big oil and gas company or an ordinary citizen," Mr Pritchard said.

In a further twist, it now appears that Woodside is applying for retrospective approval for the work, but not from the Shire. Woodside has applied through a new planning approval mechanism known as a Development Assessment Panel (DAP). This means it will not go through the normal process whereby all Councillors vote on it and the community would have a chance to have their say. A Development Assessment Panel has only two local Councillors on it. The other three members are chosen by the government.

"It looks like Woodside has tried to by-pass Shire decision-making processes by going to the DAP. It's not a democratic way of decision-making," Mr Pritchard said.

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