

Leaked study picks Kimberley as site for gas hub

Tom Arup
ENVIRONMENT CORRESPONDENT

THE ROW over the construction of Woodside's \$30 billion gas hub in the Kimberley wilderness will come to a head on Monday when a three-year government study will formally recommend building the massive project on a stretch of the Kimberley coast.

The draft strategic review of sites in and around the Kimberley, obtained by the Wilderness Soci-

ety and given to the *Herald* before its public release next week, says a 1.5 kilometre stretch of the Kimberley shoreline near James Price Point, is the most commercially viable site for a liquefied natural gas processing hub.

The assessment is the result of a February 2008 agreement between the Commonwealth and West Australian governments to determine the best site for the hub to tap the massive gas reserves in the Browse Basin.

Since that agreement was signed, the WA Premier, Colin Barnett, has nominated James Price Point as his preferred site – well before the outcome of the strategic assessment – and moved to compulsorily acquire land from indigenous owners, citing concerns that delays could mean the project, claimed to generate 6000 jobs, would not go ahead or would leave the state.

That sparked an anti-gas hub campaign from environmental-

ists, including celebrity backers such as Missy Higgins, John Butler and the former Midnight Oil drummer Rob Hirst.

The West Australian co-ordinator of the Wilderness Society, Peter Robertson, said yesterday the strategic assessment had not adequately considered sites outside the ecologically sensitive Kimberley region, contravening the 2008 agreement between the state and federal governments.

Two reviews of sites outside of

the Kimberley cited by the report found the extra cost of piping would be prohibitive for the project's partners, which include Woodside. But Mr Robertson said these two reports present only cursory examinations.

"Bearing a striking similarity to the discredited Gunns pulp mill process in Tasmania, the strategic assessment report is now unable to provide the basis for a sound decision by either the WA or federal environment

ministers on whether to approve the development or not and must be rejected accordingly," he said.

The draft strategic review, which is a year late, finds there will be significant environmental impacts from dredging associated with the construction and the unavoidable clearance of native vegetation and habitats.

The review also finds a number of listed threatened species could be affected by the con-

struction and operation of the gas hub, including humpback whales, sea turtles and the greater bilby.

A spokeswoman for Mr Barnett said the Premier would not comment on the draft strategic review at this point in the process.

In an interview with the *Herald* last month the federal Environment Minister, Tony Burke, said the issues around the Kimberley "are potentially the most complex I face in this portfolio".

"You have an intersection of indigenous issues, economic resources and some of the most pristine and magnificent country I have ever seen," Mr Burke said.

The draft strategic review will be made public on Monday morning for public comment. The final report will be handed to Mr Burke early next year, and the plant's go-ahead will be subject to his final approval under national environment laws.

Plenty of room at beachside luxury inns

Hamish Boland-Rudder

IF YOU'VE always wondered how the other half live during the summer months, this might be your chance.

Lower occupancy rates in luxurious locations such as Palm Beach have meant that some properties have been discounted by as much as 30 per cent.

"Usually the \$10,000 to \$15,000 [a week] range is most popular but this year it was everything under that \$10,000 mark that was snapped up first," said Amethyst McKee, from LJ Hooker Palm Beach.

She believes that many people are capitalising on the strong Australian dollar and choosing overseas destinations, which has pushed down prices for some holiday rental accommodation.

With Christmas falling on a Saturday, property managers have also been forced to be more flexible with minimum rental periods. While most are full between Christmas and the new year, Maureen Fyffe, the holiday manager at George Brand Real Estate on the central coast, said there were still shorter-stay options open for negotiation, particularly at the upper end of the market.

"Vacancies are up because of the odd dates [at Christmas] this year," she said. "There are some great bargains to be had."

But a little further from Sydney there has been more demand for the mid-range rentals. Belinda Novicky, from NSW Mid-North Coast Tourism, believes that many travellers are choosing quality family time over luxurious holiday splurges.

"Families are seeking to reconnect," she said, and smaller towns such as Harrington, South West Rocks and Old Bar were proving popular.

"This year has definitely been a lot busier than usual," said Natalie Cavanagh, from LJ Hooker Old Bar Beach.

"We were taking bookings from much earlier in the year."

South of Sydney has experienced much of the same high demand for more out-of-the-way properties.

"We've seen huge growth this year," said Helen Foote, of Ray White Kiama. Increased interest has been shown in quiet spots just out of town, such as riverfront houses in Minnamurra, north of Kiama.

Batemans Bay can also expect a bumper Christmas season. Holiday-makers are coming from all over NSW.

"We're up 24 per cent from this time last year," said Raine and Horne's Batemans Bay principal, Adam Porteous.

But it appears that most Sydneysiders are not yet willing to travel as far south as Merimbula or Eden.

"We're definitely busier than last year," said Kathy Hay, the property manager at Ray White Merimbula. Most her clients are from south of the border.

"We're Victoria's Gold Coast!"

with Emily Crane

SUMMER RENTALS



Byron Bay (Byron Bay)
LJ Hooker Bookings **Busy**
Property **Unit**
Price **\$3200**
Detail **Two-bedroom, ocean views**



Coffs Harbour (Sapphire Beach, just north of Coffs)
Pacific Property Management Bookings **Quiet**
Property **Unit**
Price **\$1750**
Detail **Two-bedroom, beachfront resort**



Old Bar (Old Bar Beach)
LJ Hooker Bookings **Busy**
Property **House**
Price **\$1000**
Detail **Four-bedroom, on the beach**

Port Macquarie (Town Beach)
Elders Bookings **Steady**
Property **Unit**
Price **\$1300**
Detail **Two-bedroom, town centre**



Forster (Boomerang Beach, south of Forster)
Pacific Palms Holiday Rentals Bookings **Steady**
Property **House**
Price **\$3500**
Detail **Three-bedroom, on the sand dunes**



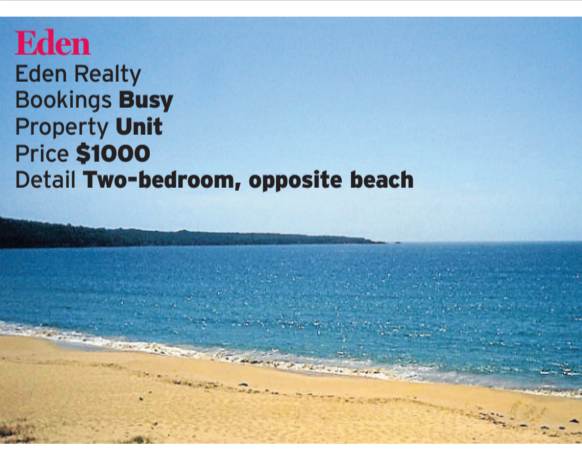
Central Coast (North Avoca Beach)
George Brand Real Estate Bookings **Quiet**
Property **House**
Price **\$3300**
Detail **Sleeps 10, walk to beach**



Palm Beach (Avalon beach)
LJ Hooker Bookings **Quiet**
Property **House**
Price **\$8000**
Detail **Four-bedroom, walk to beach**

Kiama (Kiama Downs)
Ray White Kiama Bookings **Busy**
Property **House**
Price **\$3000**
Detail **Four-bedroom, full ocean views**

Jervis Bay (Hyams beach)
First National Bookings **Steady**
Property **House**
Price **\$1600**
Detail **Two-bedroom, minutes from beach**



Eden
Eden Realty Bookings **Busy**
Property **Unit**
Price **\$1000**
Detail **Two-bedroom, opposite beach**

Batemans Bay (Malua Bay)
Raine and Horne Bookings **Busy**
Property **House**
Price **\$1800**
Detail **Four-bedroom, 50m from beach**

Merimbula
Ray White Bookings **Busy**
Property **Unit**
Price **\$2000**
Detail **Three-bedroom, water views, close to town**



GIVING

I saw this pig and I thought of you – charity gifts take off this season

Tom Reilly

A BAG of manure may not be everyone's idea of a great Christmas present. Over the past five years, cow dung and offerings such as fish farms, goats and donkeys have become increasingly popular.

But don't fret over how to look convincingly grateful when unwrapping something even less welcome than another pair of socks or a box of hankies – the gifts are sent on your behalf to those that need them in developing nations.

"In Australia a lot of us are in the fortunate position where we have what we need and it can be difficult to find somebody a present that can be meaningful," says Leigh Stewart, from Oxfam.

"We began our gift options in 2005 and have been really pleased at the response – it's clear that there is a large demand for giving somebody a present which goes to help those less fortunate."

When Oxfam introduced its Unwrapped service in 2005, it raised \$1.6 million in the first year. This has soared to \$5 million and nearly 90 per cent of the turnover is made in the run-up to Christmas.

Nearly all large charities that operate in the developing world – including Save the Children, UNICEF and Christian Aid – offer similar gift ideas.



Feeling clucky... Oxfam is offering ducks, pigs and poo as gifts to help people in developing countries.

World Vision began the Smiles catalogue in 2003 and it now brings in almost \$6 million. The charity's spokeswoman, Amanda Warrick, said the presents were a "significant" fund-raiser for the charity that also raised awareness of its work.

Dr Wendy Scaife, an expert in fund-raising from the centre for philanthropy at the Queensland University of Technology, believes events such as September 11, 2001, and the Asian tsunami in 2004 may have encouraged Australians to give gifts that go to the Third World.

"Those two tragedies made a lot of us begin to think a little bit more carefully about their lives and what was important. Quite

a few people are now turning their back on that overtly commercial idea of Christmas and of presents and wanting to put our money where it can help others.

"It was around 2005 that I really began to notice the growth in charities using these gift services and it seems to be getting bigger and bigger each year."

The concept has also proved popular because the presents can be fun and quirky as well.

Ms Stewart said: "The gifts of animals are always the most popular because I think people quite enjoy the idea of giving somebody a pig or a goat, though you have to be quite careful when you say to somebody, 'I saw this pig and I thought of you.'"

He's dreaming of a home-grown, true blue Aussie Christmas tree

Kelly Burke

THE curse of La Nina has hit nurseries across the state as successive wet weekends cut revenue by 10 per cent compared with this time last year.

Despite the warm, wet spring providing ideal conditions, gardeners had shied away from planting, said the chief executive of Nursery and Garden Industry NSW and ACT, Mike Skegg. It had hit hard businesses that relied on weekends for two-thirds of their trade and the months of September to early December for up to 70 per cent of annual revenue.

The slump has failed to daunt one self-taught horticulturist, however, in his decade-long attempt to market what he claims is the closest thing yet to a native Australian Christmas tree.

Alan Rate admits to much trial and error over the years in cultivating *Adenanthe sericeus* – commonly known as woolly bush – a native to Western Australia's coastal regions and a member of the proteaceae family.

Along the way he has lost hundreds of prototypes to drought, rain, heat and in one season, the theft of his entire irrigation system from a trial plantation in Peats Ridge.



Going native... Alan Rate and his woolly bush. Photo: Domino Postiglione

"I'm silly, I don't have much money, and I've probably put about \$12,000 into it so far, which for me is big bucks," he said. "I'm not a commercial animal."

The tree looks surprisingly like a conifer, with green foliage covered in silky hairs that give a silvery effect in the sunlight.

Mr Rate, who is spruiking the plant as the "kangaroo's Christmas tree" from his one-man outfit in Hornsby, cites the tree's height – two metres at maturity if kept potted – as further evidence of its perennial yuletide use. It even comes with its own decorations – small red tubular

flowers that appear intermittently throughout spring and summer.

What continues to elude him, however, is that "Christmassy" pine smell.

He is not without rivals.

For many years a Brisbane landscape architect, Lawrie Smith, has been promoting the *Podocarpus elatus* – commonly known as the black pine – as the ideal native Christmas tree, because of its pyramid shape.

But at seven metres tall, his own black pine – which his family had decorated for 10 years – has outgrown its festive function.

So, too, has his *Callitris baileyi*, (Bailey's cypress) another candidate vying for the title of native Australian Christmas tree.

This year Mr Smith is directing his grandchildren's decorating enthusiasm towards a Daintree pine in his garden, which he reckons will remain a manageable height for the next five years.

"I think it is important to encourage the use of our Australian species, as opposed to the northern hemisphere migrants," he said.

"After all, they have been here on the continent for so many millions of years."



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