

Tough Conditions Imposed On Gorgon

The Western Australian government has effectively given the green light to the massive Gorgon gas project, after setting a raft of tough new environmental conditions.

Former Environment Minister Mark McGowan said the approval of the project with stringent conditions meant the environmental risks could be managed. He said the protection plan involved an additional \$60 million commitment by the Gorgon joint venturers to a series of new initiatives to conserve the flatback turtle population and protect other endangered species.

It also included a government commitment to expand land and marine parks and reserves in the Pilbara and lower west Kimberley, to protect turtles and improve the management of the existing Montebello/Barrow Islands conservation reserves. There is also a series of stringent conditions on the project concerning dredging, quarantine, greenhouse gas reinjection, flatback turtle monitoring, short-range endemics and subterranean fauna.

McGowan said the Gorgon project would involve the biggest greenhouse gas reinjection process in the world, an important technology to introduce into WA. "If we are to continue exporting clean energy to the world, then we need to come to terms with our domestic carbon dioxide emissions, and greenhouse gas sequestration is at least part of the answer", he said.

"The government has impressed upon the joint venturers, and they have agreed, that every step must be taken to reduce the likelihood of any non-native species getting a foothold on the island", he said. "They have also recognised the importance of investing \$32.5 million in a flatback turtle conservation program to ensure this species not only survives but their numbers are increased."

McGowan said the new environmental conditions were in addition to an existing commitment by the joint venture partners to provide \$40 million

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to the State to deliver conservation projects to protect native plants and animals in environments similar to Barrow Island.

In June 2006, the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) recommended that the project not proceed, based on its conclusion that environmental risks remained around the flatback turtle populations, dredging, introduction of non-indigenous species and subterranean and short-range invertebrate fauna.

The EPA also advised that the project would be environmentally unacceptable if it did not include a scheme designed to inject a high percentage of the reservoir CO₂ back into the subsurface 2,000 m below Barrow Island, or implement alternative measures to reduce the equivalent amount of reservoir CO₂ vented to the atmosphere. McGowan

said the EPA had played an important role in identifying environmental risks, prompting the development of a more rigorous regime of environmental mitigation measures.

Chevron Australia Managing Director, Jay Johnson, welcomed the announcement which he said reaffirmed the Gorgon participants' belief that the project can proceed in an environmentally responsible way on Barrow Island.

Gorgon's environmental assessment was the result of more than three years' preparation and includes the research and contributions of more than 100 independent experts and

extensive community consultation. Through this process, the project has refined a number of development designs, allowing equal or better environmental outcomes.

APPEA Chief Executive Officer, Belinda Robinson, said the decision was good news on all fronts and paved the way for final environmental approval. "This decision confirms that major oil and gas projects and the environment can coexist in a way that meets community expectations both in terms of environmental management and economic development", Robinson said.

She said the Australian petroleum industry takes its environmental responsibilities extremely seriously and the Gorgon gas project would be no exception. ■