

Fears remain for Ningaloo ecology despite Subsea 7's new Gulf pipelines plan

Shannon Beattie | The West Australian
Tuesday, 21 May 2019 4:40PM



The proposed Heron Point site to be used by Subsea 7. Picture: Supplied

New plans for a controversial pipe-bundling facility in the Exmouth Gulf have been lodged with the State's environmental watchdog, just days after the previous assessment was withdrawn.

Subsea 7 asked the Environmental Protection Authority to terminate a previous application for its Heron Point project on May 15 after being told requested changes to seabed disturbance were too significant to accommodate.

The company submitted a new referral to the EPA on Monday, which will now decide what level of assessment, if any, is required.

"We have done this because we felt there was some confusion among stakeholders about additional information provided to the EPA in November 2018, the S43A process, and the overall process for the environmental approval for the project," a Subsea 7 spokeswoman said.

"Subsea 7 reaffirm that this is a low-impact development that provides a net improvement in the environmental impact to the way pipelines are installed in the North West Shelf region."

The proposal would see a pipe bundling facility constructed south of Exmouth to carry gas and communication lines to offshore gas fields.

In February, Subsea 7 requested changes to its original proposal, including increasing the seabed disturbance in the Gulf from one hectare to about 1834ha.

Opponents believe this would risk coral beds and affect hundreds of marine species in an area recognised as a nursery for the World Heritage-listed Ningaloo Reef.

Protect Ningaloo campaigner Jeremy Tager said it was “absurd” of Subsea 7 to suggest the revised proposal would have environmental benefits.

“It has now been exposed and they need to answer the question of why they so dramatically understated the impacts from the beginning,” he said.

“We expect the EPA will demand that the thousands of hectares of sea bottom likely to be impacted by pipelines and chains scouring the sea floor will now be fully and properly assessed.

“This proposal would be a disaster for the natural and aesthetic values of the Gulf.”

Public comment on the new proposal is open until May 26.