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LNG vessels leave South Korea bound for WA

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The world's largest semi-submersible platform left South Korea and is headed towards the Browse Basin, 425m north of Broome.

A once-in-a-lifetime migration of LNG production vessels from Korea has begun, with waters off WA the destination.

The Ichthys Explorer, the offshore central processing facility for the Inpex-led LNG project, has sailed from Samsung Heavy Industry's Geoje shipyard. The world's biggest ever vessel, Shell's 488m Prelude floating LNG facility, is waiting its turn at the same shipyard.

The second Inpex vessel, the 336m Ichthys Venturer, is nearing completion less than 20km away in a Daewoo shipyard.



The Prelude FLNG vessel.

An Inpex spokesman confirmed the central processing facility had set sail and marine traffic monitoring website Vessel Finder showed the Ichthys Explorer, the world's biggest semi-submersible platform, being towed south by four tugs and due to arrive at the Ichthys field, about 200km off the Kimberley coast, on May 30.

The Ichthys Explorer will separate the gas, that is piped 890km to Darwin, from the liquids, that are sent to the Ichthys Venturer and then loaded onto tankers.

A project schedule lodged by Inpex with the offshore safety regulator in December indicates that six months after the first vessel arrives on site gas could reach Darwin. This would be late November.

Inpex is targeting a start of production by September.



The Ichthys Explorer is the world's biggest semi-submersible platform.

It is not known when the Ichthys Venturer will leave Korea.

Shell had planned for Prelude to sail in July but this may be delayed to September, according to industry sources.

WestBusiness understands September is the latest sail date that would allow Prelude to be secured in position before the Australian cyclone season.

A Shell spokeswoman said Prelude was nearing the end of construction and commissioning and was on track to provide significant cash flows next year, but would not comment further on its schedule.

Offshore Weather Services operations manager Peter Wellby said avoiding cyclones was a key consideration when towing large vessels. He said the most likely route from the shipyards at the southern tip of Korea was directly south, past the east coast of the Philippines, through the islands between Sulawesi and Irian Jaya and the Lombok Strait east of Bali.



At HR Wallingford in Fremantle, a state of the art simulation centre has brought together the team responsible for towing the Prelude FLNG facility from Geoje in south Korea and positioning it at the remote Prelude gas field in the East Browse Basin, 200 kilometres off the coast of WA. Picture: Shell Australia.