

Trust urges Burrup plan



National Trust of Australia (WA) chief Tom Perrigo. "Legal pursuits are not out of the question."

By WA correspondent
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The National Trust of Australia (WA) has called for a comprehensive management plan for ancient rock art on the Burrup

Peninsula off the West Australian north-west coast, the epicentre of the booming resources economy.

The trust is also considering legal action against resources giant Woodside Petroleum and the WA Government to force the conservation of the massive collection of ancient engravings, known as petroglyphs, dating back 20,000 years.

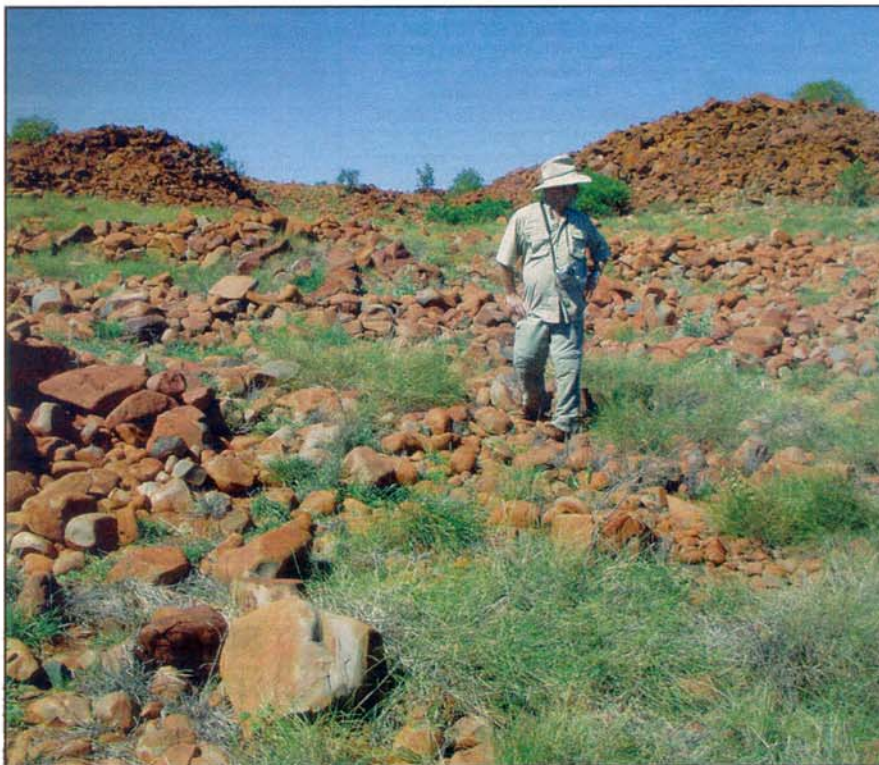
The threat of development prompted the New York-based World Monument Fund to place the Burrup Peninsula on its list of 100 Most Endangered Heritage Places, bringing world attention to the site which scientists say is as important as the Egyptian Pyramids or Stonehenge.

Woodside has applied for two Section 18 notices for an area of land on which it plans to build facilities to process and export gas from the Pluto gas deposit in the Indian Ocean, about 190km north-west of Karratha.

Section 18 notices are issued when development may result in the destruction of an Indigenous site. They are served on the Aboriginal Cultural Materials Committee (ACMC) of the WA Department of Indigenous Affairs, but WA Indigenous Affairs Minister Sheila McHaile has the right of veto over any decision the committee makes.

The National Trust claims that since 1972, when the Aboriginal Heritage Act started, about 5000 petroglyphs have been destroyed by development, and during that time the ACMC has not made one decision that would have impeded development on the Burrup or anywhere else in WA.

National Trust (WA) chief executive officer Tom Perrigo says he has appealed to Woodside and the WA Government to halt development on the Burrup to prevent any further destruction of the



National Trust of Australia special projects officer Robin Chapple in the field on the Burrup Peninsula: "We know that governments over time have already allowed the destruction of, to our estimation, 10,000 pieces of rock art."

petroglyphs and other valuable Aboriginal heritage sites.

The National Trust was one of three organisations to lobby the Federal Government to include the Burrup on the National Heritage Register, and a decision on the proposals is expected in September from Federal Heritage Minister Ian Campbell.

Mr Perrigo said the decision to lobby for inclusion on the register was one of several strategies being considered by the Trust.

"That was only in response to the fact that we could not get the WA Government to show the leadership in resolving this issue," Mr Perrigo said.

"Legal pursuits are not out of the question. We hope that would

never occur, of course, because I do believe that we are capable of developing a win-win scenario."

Mr Perrigo said he would be scrutinising the Section 18 process and all other issues concerning the protection of the site.

Regulators

"At the moment our concerns are with those regulators who determine that process, but I can assure you that we're also concerned with Woodside's actions and our relationship with Woodside will sour considerably if they continue to destroy the world's greatest cultural heritage treasure."

One of the problems facing all parties is the fact that a proper

audit of the petroglyphs has never been done.

Estimates on the number of petroglyphs vary wildly from half a million to a million, and the Trust has called on major development to move to other areas nearby while an inventory is taken of the Burrup.

National Trust special projects officer Robin Chapple said there is evidence that a total of 10,000 petroglyphs have been destroyed since development began in 1962, but no records were kept of what was destroyed.

"We still don't know what's there so when we actually come across an engraving and we make the comment 'well we can destroy it because there's lots more' we don't know if there's

lots more of that type because we don't have an inventory," Mr Chapple said.

"We don't know what's already been lost. We believe there may be four or five phases on the Burrup, some of the oldest being older than 20,000 years, and some of the newer material being about 6000 years."

Mr Chapple said that an audit would be worth the expense.

"It would take many years and it would cost an awful lot of money, but when you consider the amount of money we spend on the Pyramids, which are only a quarter of the age, then you can start to put it in some sort of perspective."

"We have no understanding of what's in the Burrup. We have no understanding of how much material has already been stolen, and we know that governments over time have already allowed the destruction of, to our estimation, 10,000 pieces of rock art."

A spokesman for Senator Campbell said there would be no comment on the issue until the Minister handed down his decision in September on whether the Burrup would be placed on the National Heritage Register.

The WA Government also declined an interview, instead issuing a statement from WA Resources Minister John Bowler opposing the National Heritage proposal on economic grounds.

In the statement, Mr Bowler said the WA Government is committed to preserving the ancient rock art through an effective management plan.

National Trust WA president Professor Jenny Gregory said the Trust was trying to conserve culture and science, not stop development.

"We need the development but there's got to be a way of undertaking development without damaging this extraordinary ancient treasure that's been left to us from the past and really it's up to us to protect it for future generations," she said.

"If we don't, we're really falling short of our obligations."