

Rock art focus

Arab television takes a look at the Burrup Peninsula

By Ben Cranston

CONTROVERSIAL Arab television network Al Jazeera, best known in Australia for screening messages from terrorist leader Osama Bin Laden, has turned its cameras to the North West of WA.

An Al Jazeera documentary film crew, including former Channel 10 journalist Dan Nolan, recently filmed ancient Aboriginal rock art on the Burrup Peninsula and assessed damage done by industry and tourists.

The petroglyphs, thousands of years old on the Burrup Peninsula, are of worldwide interest.

Al Jazeera is the world's second biggest television network and the biggest Arabic News Channel in the Middle East. It offers news coverage 24 hours a day from around the world and focusing on the hottest regions of conflict.

Founded in 1996, and based in Qatar, the Al Jazeera news network is one of the fastest growing networks among Arab communities and Arabic speaking people around the world.

It claims to have at least 40-million viewers in the Arab world.

While the majority of viewers in a recent survey who were not liv-

ing in the Arab world watched it on satellite in the United States – the network planned to launch here in Australia under the Foxtel banner in the coming months.

National Trust chairman Robin Chapple escorted the television crew around the Burrup and said it would air one extended news piece and a 10-minute documentary some time next month.

The crew also filmed a story on the North West resources boom with companies including Rio Tinto.

Company spokeswoman Katina Dawson said the network fired questions about the resources boom at Pilbara Iron's managing director, David Smith, who was also a WA Chamber of Minerals and Energy board member.

The film crew also visited the Rio Tinto mine at Tom Price.

Al Jazeera also tried contacting Premier Alan Carpenter, but were passed on to Resources Minister John Bowler.

North West Coastal MLA Fred Riebeling said he did not care how Al Jazeera chose to portray the State Government and its actions on the Burrup by failing to lock up

all rock art at the peninsula.

"I think everything we're doing here can be put up on a world class basis," Mr Riebeling said.

He said the television network was only interested in the North West because it was the powerhouse of the Australian economy and he hoped it stayed that way for the next 100 years.

But National Trust spokesman Mr Chapple said Australians suffered from cultural short sightedness and only realised they were making a mistake once the rest of the world said so.

"We often don't realise something is important until we see the world media get hold of it," Mr Chapple said.

"In Australia, we can put immense protection over somewhere like Cossack because it is European heritage."

But the moment an issue involved indigenous heritage, Australians turned their backs, he said.

The Arab world was about to learn about the resources boom and the sacrifice of rock art for the sake of industry on the Burrup.