

Campbell backs Burrup heritage listing

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The vast array of rock art which is under threat from commercial developments on Western Australia's Burrup Peninsula meets requirements for National Heritage listing, federal Environment Minister Ian Campbell said.

But public comment would be sought before a decision on the site's fate was known, he said.

The site, said to include hundreds of thousands of petroglyphs, is several thousands of years old, dating back to the last Ice Age.

But developers of the north-west gas field off WA want to build an onshore facility on the peninsula.

Senator Campbell said the Australian Heritage Council had completed its assessment of the area and advised him of its opinion that the area meets the high threshold for inclusion in the National Heritage List.

He said the Council also had provided a potential boundary for a listing.

"Agreeing on the right boundary is a key element of ensuring the heritage and economic values of the area can co-exist into the future," he said in a statement.

"I have previously publicly stated that I am fully aware of the significant heritage values of the area and of the need to protect these values.

"I am also very conscious of the enormous economic values of the area and its significance to the nation's economy.

"We have to get the balance right."

Senator Campbell said the boundary proposed by the council covered 874 sq km, including about 100 sq km of the Burrup Peninsula itself and most of the islands of the Dampier Archipelago.

"It is important to remember that the current and proposed economic developments only relate to particular areas on the Burrup Peninsula," he said.

Senator Campbell later declined to say when he would make the decision.

"The decision I will make will ultimately ensure that all of those interests are balanced," he told ABC Radio.

"I'm confident, having spoken to many of the major stakeholders that those three goals - unimpeded economic development of the Burrup, exports of gas and iron ore and other major exports, the environmental benefits that flow from natural gas exports, and the long-term protection of the rock art - can be done simultaneously.

"But it is complex and it's a lot of work but I'm confident the right decision can be made.

"But I'm not going to rush that decision."

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