

Mine comes before art, after war

Report Tracy Sutherland

The federal government has been accused of double standards on national heritage as Prime Minister John Howard tries to block mining on the Kokoda Trail, at the same time as the government is considering allowing the destruction of world heritage rock art on West Australia's Burrup Peninsula.

Mr Howard has sent a high-level delegation to Papua New Guinea to express concern about proposed gold and copper mining at Kokoda where hundreds of Australian soldiers lost their lives during World War II.

The Gold Coast-based mining company, Frontier Resources, has proposed mining in the area, which is estimated to have deposits worth a reported \$1.3 billion.

"We obviously respect the laws of Papua New Guinea, but the Kokoda Trail is of enormous historic and military significance to Australia," Mr Howard told Southern Cross Radio.

"There has to be a way that fairness and justice can be done for all interests."

Opposition Leader Kim Beazley has expressed support for Mr Howard's Kokoda stand.

But Australian Greens leader Bob Brown has accused Mr Howard of practising double standards: "On the one hand he is demanding Papua New Guinea curtail gold mining near the Kokoda Track because of its iconic significance for Australia. On the other hand he is giving the go-ahead for destruction of more of the world heritage value [Burrup] Aboriginal rock art," Senator Brown said.

Environment Minister Ian Campbell announced on Friday that an Australian Heritage Council assessment of the Burrup area had concluded that it met the high threshold for inclusion in the National Heritage List. However, he said he would take another two months to make a final decision after liaising with stakeholders.

Senator Campbell has conceded some rock art would have to be destroyed to make way for Woodside Petroleum's liquefied natural gas plant, but he has stressed that development should not be impeded.

Woodside said about 90 per cent of the rock art would not be disturbed by the plant's construction.