



Transcript

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PM - New factors prompt further Burrup Peninsula consideration

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Reporter: Alexandra Kirk

MARK COLVIN: There's a new factor today in the argument over whether energy and economic development, or conservation and history should decide the future of the Burrup Peninsula in Western Australia.

The area in the State's rugged northwest is home to some of the world's oldest and most important rock carvings.

A month ago the Federal Environment Minister Ian Campbell said some of them would have to be sacrificed so Woodside Petroleum could build a natural gas plant there.

Now the Minister's own heritage advisory body says the rock art means that the Burrup Peninsula has "outstanding national heritage values to the nation".

Mr Campbell has given himself another two months to consult all involved, including Woodside, before deciding whether to list the Peninsula on the National Heritage register.

But the Greens' leader Bob Brown says Senator Campbell now has all the evidence he needs to go ahead with the heritage listing.

From Canberra, Alexandra Kirk reports.

ALEXANDRA KIRK: Exceptional is a word used many times by the Environment Minister's own heritage advisory body, the Australian Heritage Council.

When describing the tens of thousands of rock engravings in the Dampier Archipelago, which includes the Burrup Peninsula, the job of the Heritage Council is to assess whether

the place has, quote "outstanding heritage value to the nation" on a long list of criteria.

When it comes to the rock art, the report finds the Archipelago has national heritage values for what it calls the outstanding diversity of engraved human forms, its rare concentrations of rock engravings, the outstanding antiquity of depictions of complex scenes showing human activity, its rare concentration of standing stones, stone pits and circular stone arrangements, plus an outstanding potential to yield information that will contribute to understanding the nation's cultural history.

Green's leader Bob Brown says that's all the information, the Environment Minister, Ian Campbell, needs to immediately list the area on the National Heritage Register.

BOB BROWN: Not listing the Burrup for Australian national heritage would be like not listing the Great Barrier Reef.

And this report endorses that call by saying, "clearly, the place has Australian heritage values and all of it."

ALEXANDRA KIRK: The Environment Minister though has given himself another couple of months of least to speak to all the stakeholders.

He says it's a complex decision that must strike a compromise between the indigenous rock art and development.

He says natural gas cuts greenhouse emissions by up to 60 per cent. So he's keen not to impede that export development.

Bob Brown doesn't agree that the Minister faces a difficult decision.

BOB BROWN: No, it's a very clear decision and it's been made by the Australian Heritage Council.

They used the word, "outstanding" repeatedly in terms of this rock art, and that's what it is.

It's a world, top-rate, rock art site. The report talk about the antiquity. It predates the pyramids of Egypt and Stonehenge by many thousands of years.

And what the report makes clear is that the proposal by Woodside to further erode the Burrup Peninsula's majestic rock art precinct, ought not be allowed.

And the Minister has got to take that up.

ALEXANDRA KIRK: But the Minister Ian Campbell insists he can't just go ahead with the heritage listing.

IAN CAMPBELL: I don't have all the information I need, and I don't have the ... I don't have an agreement between all the stakeholders that would allow the economic interests of Australia and the environmental interests of the world to not be affected by the potential risk to investment that a heritage listing without going through a proper process of designing a management plan for the future, a management plan that protects the heritage but also protects the ongoing development.

So we can continue to export more and more natural gas to the world, replace coal, replace oil in the Northern Hemisphere, and massively reduce the world's greenhouse gas emission.

ALEXANDRA KIRK: Why not try and convince, for example, Woodside Petroleum to put its onshore gas plant to the north of the area so that the rock carvings wouldn't be affected?

IAN CAMPBELL: Look, the reality is that in Dampier Archipelago, there are hundreds of square kilometres of rock carvings and it is quite possible with minimal disturbance to the rock carvings to ensure that we have an economic development of the Burrup, and the massive benefits that brings to the world's environment by ...

ALEXANDRA KIRK: Why not have economic development and no damage to the rock carvings?

IAN CAMPBELL: Well it's not necessary to do that. You do not have to have an absolutist position here. You can in fact ensure that you have continuing development of the Burrup with minimal disturbance to the rock art.

Anyone who knows the extent of this rock art, and who says that none of it should be disturbed is taking an absolutist position that will hurt Australia's economy and it will hurt the world's environment.

You need the benefit of good, clean West Australian natural gas going to North America, going into China, going to Korea, going to Japan, replacing oil and coal burning fire power stations to massively reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the world.

And that will take place up on the Burrup in the future, and it can take place in a way where a majority of that rock art can be protected in perpetuity.

ALEXANDRA KIRK: So when are you planning to make a final decision?

IAN CAMPBELL: I will make the decision when we know that we can get a win, win, win situation.

ALEXANDRA KIRK: And could that happen next year rather than this year?

IAN CAMPBELL: I think that it is highly likely that it will go into next year, because

this is a really big balancing act.

And we can get it right. We're sophisticated enough to get it right. There is very good will on behalf of all of the people involved.

I think those who just say, "oh, go ahead and heritage list it and work out the management later really are not fair dinkum."

MARK COLVIN: The Federal Environment Minister, Senator Ian Campbell, with Alexandra Kirk.

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