

PRESS RELEASE

World's largest collection of ancient Aboriginal rock art now being destroyed by industrial development

Covering 115sq km, and carved out of solid granite, the petroglyphs on the Burrup Peninsula in remote North-West Australia range up to 30,000 years in age. The rock art depicts humans, hunting-scenes, 'climbing men', and most interestingly, animals that are now extinct, such as the fat tailed kangaroo and the Tasmanian devil. The sacred cultural landscape contains scenes that are considered to be more animated and complex than any other carvings in Australia and perhaps the world. The whole site has yet to be documented in its entirety and since 1972, when a register was established, 4776 petroglyphs and 350 sites have been destroyed by industrial development.

The present threat comes from a new liquefied gas storage area, developed by Woodside Petroleum and the Western Australian State Government to be sited on top of a significant percentage of the ancient rocks. The Dampier Archipelago is a collection of islands located off the North West coast of Western Australia, and is close to the large oil and gas reserves of the Indian Ocean. The National Trust of Western Australia, is calling for the current development to be relocated to an area close by that has already been cleared of petroglyphs and a moratorium on any further destruction of this world monument. Work is scheduled to start by the end of this year.

"It's the equivalent of finding oil under Stonehenge and deciding to blow part of it up," said Tom Perrigo, Chief Executive Officer of the National Trust of Western Australia.

The National Trust, Dampier's Indigenous peoples, and a number of heritage bodies in Australia has nominated the whole site to be included in Australia's National Heritage List. The listing would offer more protection, and an answer is expected in February 2007.

Alistair McAlpine (Lord McAlpine of West Green) who is deeply interested in Aboriginal art, has written to the Prime Minister of Australia and the State Premier for Western Australia calling for a halt of current destruction and relocation, and to honour Australia's commitment to the UNESCO declaration on cultural heritage, which the country signed just after the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001. In 2006 the Dampier Rock Art Complex was placed on the World Monument Fund's Watch List of the world's *100 Most Endangered Sites* and is considered by many to be one of the top five sites of cultural interest in Australia.

*For further information contact Will Black at WMF in Britain on 020 7730 5344
Or go to the National Trust of Western Australia website, www.burrup.org.au*