

Campbell and Siewert-Emergency listing the Burrup Peninsula- Hansard

5th Dec 06

[For context, the Environment and Heritage Minister was asked a 'Dorothy Dixer' by Government Senator Alan Eggleston during question time, which was followed up a short time later by Senator Siewert's speech]

QUESTION WITHOUT NOTICE

Senator EGGLESTON (2.13 pm)—My question is to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator Campbell. Will the minister update the Senate on the heritage nomination of the Burrup Peninsula and actions the Australian government is taking to get a good outcome for the environment and industry? Is the minister aware of any alternative approaches?

Senator IAN CAMPBELL—I thank Senator Eggleston, a senator who comes from the north of Western Australia—a part of Western Australia that contributes phenomenally to Australia's economic success and, because of the exports of liquefied natural gas from the North West Shelf, contributes substantially to the world's need to produce more energy but to do so with substantially lower greenhouse gas emissions. It should be recorded and well-known in this place that when exports of natural gas from the North West Shelf substitute for coal or oil in the Northern Hemisphere, China, Japan, Korea or North America—where we are hoping to export to soon—that gas will replace some 25 megatons of reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Replacing coal or oil with natural gas gives a 50, 60 and, sometimes, 70 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. To put that in context: Australia produces around 550 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions; this industry in the North West Shelf over 20 years, for example, would replace all of Australia's annual greenhouse gas emissions. Ensuring we have a healthy investment environment for expanding the natural gas exports from the Burrup Peninsula is phenomenally important for the global environment.

I have been progressing the consideration of a heritage nomination for the rock art on the Burrup and the Dampier Archipelago over recent months and I have made it quite clear that the government will not do a heritage listing that in any way constrains the expansion of that important natural gas industry in the Burrup. Yes, when it expands it does disturb rock art—it does—but let's put this in perspective as well.

The rock art on the Burrup Peninsula and the Dampier Archipelago stretches over 27,000 hectares—about the size of the city of Perth—and it includes no less than roughly a million pieces of rock art, and Woodside are looking at disturbing 165 pieces. That is less than 0.02 of one per cent of the art on the peninsula. We want to have an approach that protects the economic development of Australia—that is, 80,000 direct and indirect jobs; \$10 billion a year in export revenue—but also includes protection for the rock art.

Senator Eggleston asked about alternative approaches. Within 24 hours of Kevin Rudd taking over the leadership of the Labor Party, we have from the Australian Labor Party an emergency heritage listing for the Burrup Peninsula. That is, a heritage protection measure from Dr Carmen Lawrence—from Mr Rudd's Labor Party; a senior member of Rudd Labor—wanting to close down the expansion of Woodside's project, to threaten the exports of natural gas from north-west Western Australia.

I want to see a reform to Australia's heritage laws go through this parliament this week which will enable the heritage process to be changed. I have the support of the Carpenter Labor government in this.

I call on Kevin Rudd to call Carmen Lawrence into line and say that he supports our natural gas exports, supports the contribution Australia can make to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and supports a sensible approach to heritage listing—a win, win, win for Australia. It is time that Rudd's Labor called Carmen Lawrence in and said, 'Withdraw this heritage nomination immediately.' It is an absolute scandal and it is the first test for Mr Rudd on his first day as

Leader of the Opposition.

Senator Chris Evans interjecting—

The PRESIDENT—Order! Senator Evans, your colleague is on her feet.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia) (3.28 pm)—I move:

That the Senate take note of the answer given by the Minister for the Environment and Heritage (Senator Campbell) to a question without notice asked by Senator Eggleston today, relating to the Burrup Peninsula.

Today we had yet another embarrassing display from the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, who is better known as the minister for development. Yet again we had the minister talking about the need to develop the Burrup Peninsula rather than actually articulating what action he was going to be taking to protect the peninsula's heritage. Given that he is the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, I would have thought he would be taking responsibility for the peninsula's heritage rather than acting to facilitate the Burrup's development. I am quite horrified that the minister for heritage thinks that it is okay to trade off national heritage and what many of us believe is world heritage to develop a gas plant. He claims that it is okay to trash our national heritage because we will be producing gas which will be helping as to climate change.

So we have trashed the planet through climate change so now we will trash our heritage to address our mistakes as to climate change!

The Burrup meets the criteria for listing on the National Heritage List. The minister has clearly been told this by the Australian Heritage Council in their submission on the nomination of Burrup to the National Heritage List. The minister, as I have articulated on numerous occasions in this place, has decided not to list the area yet and to go into further consultations so he can find a way to allow development to occur on the Burrup before he heritage lists it.

As I have also articulated in this place on numerous occasions, it does not have to be a trade of one for the other; you can have a win-win situation. The Woodside development proposed for sites A and B—the Pluto development—can easily fit on the North West Shelf joint venturers' site. In fact, I wrote to the joint venture partners and received replies from all of them saying they were prepared to negotiate to co-locate the Woodside development on that site. Therefore the developers would not have to clear petroglyphs and clear our natural heritage; we could have both.

I take offence at the minister implying that the Australian Greens are trying to stop development on the Burrup in favour of the petroglyphs. We want to protect the petroglyphs but we are earnestly trying to find an alternative. The minister could be a hero in this situation by actually facilitating negotiations between the joint venturers and Woodside to have a win-win situation: save the petroglyphs—save the rock art—while also having development.

We heard recently that in fact Woodside were starting to move the petroglyphs from site A on the Burrup, thereby compromising their heritage values. Today Dr Carmen Lawrence, Mr Peter Andren and I emergency listed the Burrup. That requires the minister to make a decision in 10 days time about whether to list the Burrup on the National Heritage List. It is time that he stopped wasting time. The minister is trying to buy time so that development can go ahead before he needs to make any decisions. It is time that he moved on. It is time that he moved the development to a more appropriate site, being (a) the North West Shelf joint venturers' site, (b) the Onslow site, or (c) what I understand is the least favoured site, the maintenance site. He has got choices.

It is shameful that he tries to imply that if he lists the Burrup Peninsula that will curtail development on it. It will not.

Woodside have also indicated that they are happy to move to the joint venturers' site if they can find a way forward. Surely the minister, if he were truly carrying out his duties as the minister for heritage, would be facilitating these negotiations. If the minister had already facilitated these negotiations, we would not have had to emergency list the Burrup. We did not take that decision lightly because we believed that the normal process should be allowed to take place. But given the immediate threat of destruction posed by moving the petroglyphs—once you move them you take away their cultural relevance and cultural heritage values—we believed that we needed to move immediately to emergency list the site. The site was under the immediate threat posed by the development of the Burrup. It is time that the minister got a grip on his portfolio, got a grip on his responsibilities under the act and moved to protect the Burrup through National Heritage listing. (Time expired)