

Burrup gas to go ahead as rock art bid rejected

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Federal Environment Minister Ian Campbell has given Woodside the green light to develop part of the Burrup Peninsula for a new liquefied natural gas project, opening the door for removal of ancient rock art.

Senator Campbell rejected an emergency heritage listing sought by Labor MP Carmen Lawrence, Greens Senator Rachel Siewert and Independent MP Peter Andren over the entire Dampier Archipelago and Burrup Peninsula.

Of the 874sqkm covered by the application, Senator Campbell found only one location — an area of 200sqm — contained material with potential National Heritage value that would be put under threat by Woodside's development.

From the evidence, including advice from the Australian Heritage Council, he said he did not consider that the perceived threat to National Heritage values of the area warranted an emergency heritage listing.

While the overall region had National Heritage values, the council advised that not all sites in the Dampier Archipelago and Burrup Peninsula had the required values.

Senator Campbell said there were thought to be up to one million pieces of rock art in the Dampier Archipelago, including the Burrup. In one area, known as Site A, where Woodside planned to build LNG storage tanks, a standing stone could have potential National Heritage value. Local Aboriginal elders had been consulted and agreed the stone could be relocated.

The Minister said his office was still working on a management plan. But Senator Siewert accused the Minister of deliberately delaying a listing decision to allow development to go ahead before a proper heritage assessment had been made.

"Compounding his failure to list, the Minister is now going down the appalling path of saying that some of the art is more special and the rest can be sacrificed," she said.

Senator Campbell said it was an archaeological fact that some sites were more significant than others and that had to be considered with the enormous economic and environmental significance of Woodside's natural gas project.

Exporting natural gas as a substitute for coal had the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50 per cent.

"This is one of the biggest projects in Australia's history," he said.

Woodside welcomed the decision and a spokesman said work would start on Site A in a couple of weeks. The company would work with local elders to remove rock art.

SUSAN HEWITT