

Refusal to put rock art on heritage list condemned

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THE refusal by the Federal Government to put Aboriginal rock art in Western Australia on a heritage list has been described as a tragedy.

The application for an emergency listing for protection of Burrup Peninsula was made by the Greens senator Rachel Siewert, the Labor MP Carmen Lawrence and the independent MP Peter Andren.

The decision by the federal Minister for the Environment, Ian Campbell, against the listing will allow Woodside Energy to go ahead with building a plant for a liquefied natural gas project.

The National Trust said the site contained one of the world's largest collections of rock carvings, which date back tens of thousands of years.

It also said a group of standing stones in the area were of outstanding heritage value.

But Senator Campbell said he had accepted advice from the Heritage Council that although the region had national heritage values, not all sites in the Dampier Archipelago and the Burrup Peninsula had the required values.

One location of less than 0.2 square kilometres could be threatened, Senator Campbell said, but it was only 0.02 per cent of the area for which the three MPs had requested protection.

The area contains as many as 1 million pieces of rock art, but Woodside has promised to move them to a safe location.

Senator Campbell said in a radio interview yesterday that the emergency protection application was "basically an application from Kevin Rudd's Labor and the Greens to put a spanner in the works of the biggest natural gas project in Australian history".

Senator Siewert said the decision was a tragedy.

"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," Senator Siewert said. "This is disgraceful from a minister whose duty is to protect all of this precious and unique rock art ... How the Government can allow rock art to be relocated or destroyed is absolutely beyond me."

Woodside can now go ahead with preparatory work, but it will have to wait for separate approvals from the federal and West Australian governments before beginning the gas project.

The Burrup issue has dogged Senator Campbell for some months, as has that of the Bald Hills wind farm in Victoria.

Senator Campbell originally banned the 52-turbine wind farm in South Gippsland in April, citing a consultant's report that found that one orange-bellied parrot a year could be killed.

Modelling with the data used in the report suggested a wind farm at Bald Hills alone would result in one parrot being killed every 667 years in the worst case, and 1097 years in the best case.

This week, Senator Campbell overturned his earlier decision, allowing the wind farm to go ahead.

The developer, Wind Power, agreed to move six turbines so as not to interfere with the birds' usual flight path.

It was a victory for the developer, which had spent nearly five years trying to start work on a project that it said would, through its production of renewable energy, save greenhouse gas emission equivalent to that produced by 100,000 cars.