

Rock-art row mars Woodside gas start

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CONSTRUCTION work on what will become Australia's third liquefied natural gas processing plant has begun despite outrage that ancient Aboriginal rock art will be destroyed.

Woodside yesterday confirmed that contractor BGC had begun site clearance as part of a \$1.4 billion program involving long lead items and site works for its proposed Pluto LNG project on the Burrup Peninsula.

News of the clearance sparked immediate outrage from conservation groups which have been trying to have the site included on the Australian Heritage Register because it contains an estimated 3000 examples of Aboriginal rock art.

A Woodside spokeswoman said the site clearance was expected to take up to six months, depending on the cyclone season. She said about 150 engravings had been identified as having to be moved.

The onshore LNG plant is the key part of Woodside's 100 per cent-owned Pluto development aimed to exploit the Pluto gas field by 2010.

Woodside aims to reach a final investment decision by mid-year on a plan to spend between \$6 billion and \$10 billion to develop the Pluto field through an offshore sub-sea production system tied back to a

remotely operated platform and transported to shore through a large-diameter pipeline.

The production capacity of the initial LNG train will be 5-6 million tonnes a year, which is about twice the capacity of the Darwin LNG plant which began operating last year but only about one third the size of the nearby North West Shelf gas project which began shipments in 1989.

Aboriginal rock art, or petroglyphs, on the Burrup was identified as a cultural issue in the 1970s before environmental approval was given for the NW Shelf project, construction of which involved placing significant numbers of engravings in a secure compound.

The Burrup Peninsula is estimated to contain up to 1 million petroglyphs ranging in age from 6000 to 20,000 years. Some environmentalists describe it as Australia's Stonehenge and are demanding that all development be stopped.

Australian Greens senator Rachel Siewert said yesterday that the West Australian Government and Woodside would go down as vandals for allowing the destruction of rock art.

Senator Siewert called for the Pluto plant to be moved to the nearby site containing the NW Shelf gas project — a proposal previously rejected by the NW Shelf partners.