

WOODSIDE PLUTO SITE B, ABORIGINAL CULTURE AND HERITAGE

Parliamentary Statement by Minister for Indigenous Affairs Mrs M.H. Roberts on Tuesday 27th February 2007

The state government is committed to ensuring that Western Australian Aboriginal culture and heritage are protected. As the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, I have very carefully weighed up the substantial amount of evidence in relation to Woodside's Pluto project and its proposed use of industrial site B. In the interests of the state and the nation, I have decided to grant Woodside consent, subject to very stringent conditions that will help protect Aboriginal sites of high significance and provide a comprehensive cultural heritage management plan.

On 7 February this year, I visited site B on the Burrup Peninsula and walked across the area in question. I met with the land's traditional owners, community members and Woodside representatives and listened to their concerns about the proposed development. The decision to grant conditional consent to Woodside has been done in a way that will ensure that Woodside makes every possible endeavour to maintain sites in situ. If sites need to be moved, they will be moved with minimal disturbance. Should there be a need to relocate any of the material, it will be done through a consultative process with the traditional owners of the land.

Approximately 190 Aboriginal heritage sites have been identified through archaeological and ethnographic surveys. As a result of my consideration of the 190 sites, I have insisted that a further 20 remain in situ as opposed to the original number of five proposed by Woodside. In effect, that means that 25 sites will remain untouched and preserved. These include the archaeological sites for the thylacine, an animal now extinct and commonly known as the Tasmanian tiger, and the significantly important standing stone sites. Although Woodside has been proactive in its approach to Aboriginal heritage management, I have requested that staff from the Department of Indigenous Affairs conduct regular compliance checks to ensure that it fulfils the strict conditions I have imposed.

The importance of the Woodside project goes beyond its impact on the state of Western Australia and extends to the national economy. This decision is of great importance to Australia, and in today's dollar terms it will generate \$17.5 billion towards the national economy. In terms of Western Australia's benefit, the project will generate \$28 billion in wealth to the state economy. During the construction phase of Woodside's Pluto project, 5 000 jobs will be generated. Once it is operational, 200 people will be employed for the life of the project which, at this stage, is estimated to be more than 20 years.

In 2002 the traditional owners of the land negotiated with the state government that an area commonly referred to as the Burrup industrial site would be excised from any claim to native title. In return for the traditional owners negotiating that agreement, significant financial and other benefits have flowed directly to the traditional owners. The decision of the Federal Court in considering native title in 2005 confirmed that native title had in effect been extinguished over the area of the Burrup Peninsula, which includes the entire Woodside development for the production of liquefied natural gas. Having considered all the information before me, there are no economically viable alternative sites to Pluto site B. This is the only site that will bring gas on line consistent with our international commitments with countries such as Japan and China.

As Minister for Indigenous Affairs, I assure the house of my strong commitment to the wellbeing of Aboriginal people in this state, a commitment that includes supporting and maintaining Aboriginal heritage and culture.