

Heritage listing for ancient Aboriginal rock art

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A conservation group says the decision to protect Aboriginal rock art is likely to raise questions about the future of the LNG industry on the Burrup Peninsula. (Woodside)

Thousands of rare Aboriginal rock carvings on the Burrup Peninsula in the Pilbara are to be protected by being placed on the national heritage list.

The protection of the ancient artworks near Karratha has been a long running and sensitive issue with the Western Australian and federal governments attempting to balance environmental and heritage protection with development in the resource-rich area.

But the future of the artworks looks secure after the Federal Heritage Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, announced a 240 square-kilometre area of the Burrup will be placed on the national heritage list.

Mr Turnbull says he believes the right balance has been reached between development and heritage protection.

He says the decision follows a comprehensive assessment.

"It contains more than 99 per cent of the national heritage values recommend by the Australian Heritage Council, I'm satisfied we've got the balance right, the companies haven't got everything they wanted, but none the less I think everyone is now happy with the outcome," he said.

But the listing comes too late for thousands of carvings which have already been destroyed or moved to make way a multi-billion dollar liquefied natural gas plant.

Robin Chapple from the group Friends of Australian Rock Art has welcomed the decision and says it is likely to raise questions about the future of the LNG industry on the Burrup Peninsula.

"Should industry now really reconsider its position, and not be seen as international pariahs in going to this site for industrial development and relocate to the mainland, which doesn't have any of the problems associated with Burrup," he said.