

Heritage listing for Burrup rock art

NICK BUTTERLY
CAMBERA

The Federal Government will protect thousands of rare Aboriginal rock carvings on WA's Burrup Peninsula in response to a national outcry over the threat posed to the ancient pieces of art by industry in the area.

Federal Environment and Heritage Minister Malcolm Turnbull will today announce national heritage listing of 241sq km of the Burrup, near Karratha, protecting it from development.

That area is said to cover 99 per cent of the land where most known carvings and paintings are situated.

Experts say the rock art on the Burrup is some of the oldest of its kind in the world, with some carvings dating back more than 30,000 years.

As part of the deal between the Federal Government, the State Government, industry and local indigenous communities, oil and gas giant Woodside is also understood to have agreed to pay tens of millions of dollars to protect the heritage area.

However, the announcement comes

too late to prevent a number of the artefacts being moved to make way for Woodside's new \$10 billion Pluto LNG facility.

Green and conservation groups are also likely to be unhappy with the one per cent of land left outside the heritage zone, which gives Woodside the green light to continue developing oil and gas infrastructure.

Mr Turnbull said last night the decision showed industry and heritage could work together.

"The Dampier Archipelago is home to Australia's second largest tonnage port, supports thousands of jobs and contains in excess of \$35 billion in industrial developments," he said.

"The decision shows that the archipelago's significant heritage can co-exist alongside one of our most resource rich industrial areas."

Woodside has said repeatedly it would support a heritage listing if the listing recognised that both could exist alongside one another.

The company said in April it had designed its LNG facility in consultation with local Aboriginals to avoid 95 per cent of the rock art and engravings on its leases.

Those in the way will be moved, with the company estimating that up to 200 pieces of art might have to be shifted.

A leaked Federal Government-commissioned report warned earlier this year there could be millions of carvings scattered throughout the Dampier Archipelago and on surrounding islands.

Several high-profile politicians have campaigned for the listing, including Federal Labor backbencher Carmen Lawrence, former State Liberal leader Colin Barnett and former prime minister Malcolm Fraser.

Until last year, both Woodside and the State Government had opposed a national heritage listing, fearing such a move could prompt court action.