

Campaign urges Turnbull to save Burrup rock art

By David Weber

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The Friends of Australian Rock Art want an inquiry into the heritage value of the ancient carvings in the Pilbara (File photo). (ABC: ABC)



Malcolm Turnbull will be fighting to keep his Sydney seat of Wentworth in the coming election, but he could be distracted from his campaigning by two pressing issues at opposite ends of the country.

While the federal Environment Minister has to decide whether to give the go-ahead to the Gunns pulp mill in the Tamar Valley in Tasmania, he is also the target of an environmental campaign from Western Australia's Pilbara region.

The Friends of Australian Rock Art are worried about recent vandalism of artworks on WA's Burrup Peninsula. The group has taken out an advertisement in today's *Wentworth Courier* community newspaper in Sydney.

It says residents should call on the minister and demand an inquiry into the heritage value of ancient rock art on the Pilbara coast.

The panel of Burrup rock art that has been vandalised features rock carvings depicting kangaroos and fish.

The artwork is thousands of years old. The WA director of the Minerals Policy Institute, Robin Chapple, says some kind of metal tool has been used.

"This has been an absolute deliberate attempt to mark up the panel, and those markings are now there for at least the next 10,000 years," he said.

The Federal Government has already announced heritage protection for 99 per cent of the rock art across the Dampier Archipelago, including the Burrup Peninsula.

Mr Chapple says the rock art represents humankind's prehistory.

"Out there, there is motifs and material that date back 27,000 to 30,000 years, possibly the first human faces ever replicated on the planet," he said.

But the heritage-listed area does not include land where oil and gas company Woodside is proposing a liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant.

Mr Chapple says that as the federal Environment Minister, Mr Turnbull can still encourage Woodside to change its preferred location. He says the advertisement in the *Wentworth Courier* calls on residents to show their support.

"By placing the advertisement, which is a half-page ad in the one paper that's in that area, calling on the minister to review the state's decisions, is a very valid attempt to ensure that the values of the Burrup are retained," he said.

Mr Chapple says at one level it is a difficult message to get across, when only a few people in the Wentworth area would have seen the rock art.

"I would think so at one level, but we have to remember that there's been a significant campaign in relation to the Gunns activity in Tasmania going on in that electorate," he said.

"And it's quite clear that that electorate is now extremely marginal."

Wong-goo-tt-oo opposition

Mr Chapple says Mr Turnbull should agree to the specific review requested by the Wong-goo-tt-oo people, an Indigenous group opposed to the location of the LNG plant.

Wong-goo-tt-oo elder Wilfred Hicks is critical of those Indigenous people working with Woodside, advising on relocating rock art.

"I talk to people around the community, and they tell me, 'What the hell is happening on the Burrup? Why are they doing this?'" he said.

Mr Hicks says Indigenous people should not be helping the company.

"I think they're sick in the bloody head, simple as that. Because if they knew anything about their heritage, they wouldn't be doing it," he said.

Mr Turnbull was unavailable for an interview, but a spokeswoman said the proposal will be given careful and considered consideration.