

Environment Minister discusses Burrup and Kimberley with Leigh Sales



Broadcast: 04/06/2008

Reporter: Leigh Sales

Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett joins Lateline – Burrup and Kimberley section.

Part Transcript

LEIGH SALES: I want to ask you about the development of Burrup peninsula in Western Australia which house valuable Aboriginal rock art. What did you think of the outcome there last year which allowed the art to be move so the development could take place?

PETER GARRETT: Leigh, I've said in the past that if we went back 10 or 15 years there wouldn't have been development of that kind in that way on the Burrup because the rock art that's there is of enormous value and it's important culturally and it's important for heritage reasons. I think it's a real tragedy that we've seen that kind of development that long ago happened in that kind of way.

LEIGH SALES: Is there anything that you can do about it now?

PETER GARRETT: There's a significant listing national heritage listing over the Burrup, some 90 per cent of the Burrup is covered by that listing and a significant portion of that rock art is covered by that listing as well.

LEIGH SALES: Does that mean you can guarantee there will be no further development of the Burrup?

PETER GARRETT: It's not a case of guaranteeing there will be no further development. The Burrup is an industrial site and there exists already significant developments on this site and some of them have the potential to add to their capacities at some stage. One of the things about the history of the development application process in the past is that it's tended to be ad hoc, it hasn't properly or fully

recognised the other range of values at stake and on the Burrup it was this significant heritage of Aboriginal rock art. When I see what's happening with the basin and the offshore liquefied gas reserves I've made the decision for the first time under the act, with the Commonwealth and Western Australia, to actually have a joint strategic assessment of proposals for development that might come through in the first instance where the location of a common user hub might meet to process that gas so we don't see the same kind of things happen as happened in Burrup historically and the legacy which is still with us today.

LEIGH SALES: So given that, can you guarantee that the Kimberley will be protected even though at the moment it is not currently nationally heritage listed?

PETER GARRETT: What I can guarantee is that we will look very closely, not only at the development proposals that come through under the act, but also we will work absolutely as hard as we can to get a heritage assessment and a natural values assessment in place which will enable us as politicians to understand the true values the Kimberley. It's a place of enormous environmental value. It's important culturally to the people of that region and it's a place where you don't get many opportunities to make a decision of that kind. We're mindful of the responsibilities. We do want to see processing of that resource as do communities in that area because they want the economic benefits that flow but we want to make sure the environment and the cultural values of this incredible part of Australia are preserved at the same time. We have got to find that very difficult balance, but with this process, I think we're going to be in a much better position to do that.