

Alarm over ancient art

By Anne Calverley
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ANCIENT Aboriginal rock art is under threat from a wave of gas processing plants proposed for the Burrup Peninsula, according to the Greens WA.

The race is on to save a massive cluster of petroglyphs - engravings imprinted on cliffs and boulders thousands of years ago - from pollutants expected from the proposed downstream processing plants.

A \$1 billion methanol plant and a \$600 million ammonia plant are among six new gas-to-liquid projects undergoing feasibility studies for the area just off Dampier in the North-West.

Woodside Petroleum is also planning to expand its operations which in the 1960s led to more than a quarter of the painted rocks being shifted to what has become a rock-art junkyard.

It is feared even more artefacts will be destroyed because the peninsula has not been given environmental or heritage protection.

Greens (WA) MLC Robin Chapple said research showed gas emissions would have an acid-rain effect on the painted monoliths, causing them to fade.

He said the historic area should be left alone because the Maitland industrial estate on the nearby mainland could accommodate the projects.

"The Government has admitted that rock art may be damaged or re-located during construction," Mr Chapple said. "Of real concern is the fact that ongoing emissions of sulfur and nitrogen will form acidic compounds which may gradually erase the rock art."

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