

Woodside stuck between rock and art place

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Woodside Petroleum has sought approval from the West Australian government to lift heritage protection over an area containing Aboriginal rock paintings in the state's north-west so the energy group can build a liquefied natural gas plant.

Federal Environment Minister Ian Campbell is considering plans to place the area on the Burrup Peninsula and its 1200 pieces of art on the National Heritage List.

Woodside has made an application to the Aboriginal Cultural Materials Committee under section 18 of the Aboriginal Heritage Act. That would allow it to disturb the rock art, dating back as far as 20,000 years ago, on three sites on the Burrup Industrial Estate.

The application highlights the growing tensions created by the mining boom in the north-west and its impact on Aboriginal cultural heritage.

In the central Pilbara, opposition from some Aboriginal people to the construction of a new railway by

Fortescue Metals Group through a rock art site at the Woodstock-Abydos area is threatening the company's ambitious deadlines.

On the Burrup, there are more than 80 heritage sites that could be affected by the Woodside development. Since the Dampier Port was first established on the Burrup in the 1960s, about 25 per cent of the heritage sites on the peninsula have been destroyed.

Woodside said yesterday that about 90 per cent of rock art would not be disturbed by the construction of an onshore processing plant for its Pluto gas platform.

"We will keep working to ensure that we minimise impact on the other 10 per cent," a Woodside spokeswoman said. "We have got a market opportunity in 2010 and we want to meet that market opportunity. We are progressing our approvals to meet that deadline."

But the National Trust of Australia has called for a moratorium on any development until the state government has conducted a

new environmental assessment and a new management committee is set up for the entire Burrup.

Yesterday, WA Environment Minister Mark McGowan released a draft management plan for the Burrup Peninsula Conservation Reserve, but this will only cover 60 per cent of the peninsula.

WA Resources Minister John Bowler last month said that no future expansion of industry on the Burrup would affect the rock art.

In a letter to Mr Bowler,

National Trust chief executive Tom Perrigo said that it was inappropriate for Woodside's section 18 applications to proceed, given that the matter was now being considered for listing on the national heritage register.

"It would appear that Woodside's application might compromise all due processes — especially as this area is an internationally recognised cultural landscape of scientific value," Mr Perrigo said.



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