

Rock art protected, rail line developed

A CORRIDOR of land in the Pilbara has been released to aid the development of Fortescue Metals Group's proposed rail line.

Indigenous Affairs Minister Sheila McHale said the decision to excise a narrow strip of land from the Woodstock-Abydos protected area would deliver economic benefits to local indigenous people.

She said the protection of indigenous rock art was also 'paramount' in the State Government's decision.

The proposed rail line to Port Hedland from the Chichester Ranges would incorporate the protected 56-kilometres long and 200-metre wide corridor where rock art would remain 'totally protected'.

"This is a win-win outcome which protects valuable rock art and delivers jobs and economic benefits for indigenous and non-indigenous West Australians," Ms McHale said.

She said lifting the protected area status did not mean the Aboriginal Heritage Act (AHA) no longer applied to sites in the corridor.

"Before approval is granted for the railway, the developer would need to comply with strict conditions which protect rock art and minimise any other impact on Aboriginal heritage in the area," she said.

"Where excavation will need to take place, special non-explosive techniques, similar to those used in the Beaconsfield mine rescue, will

be used to guarantee there is no impact."

The Minister said the proposed project had not been opposed by the local Palyku and Kariyarra Aboriginal groups.

The rail line is part of a 2004 State Agreement covering an FMG proposal to mine in the Chichester ranges, build port facilities in Port Hedland, and construct a railway linking the two.

The final decision over the path of the rail line rests with the Planning and Infrastructure Minister.

There is already a BHP Billiton Iron Ore owned railway line operating within the protected area.