

Approval escalates rock art war

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A BATTLE over ancient rock art has escalated after a sudden decision by the West Australian Government to approve further industrial development on the Burrup Peninsula.

The National Trust has signalled it will appeal against the decision by the Environment Protection Authority, which yesterday recommended Woodside Energy's proposed Pluto gas processing plant should go ahead on the western side of Burrup, in the state's northwest.

In its report, the EPA deemed that environmental impacts could be contained, but "the proposal will result in the permanent loss of native vegetation, fauna habitat and some indigenous heritage sites".

The National Trust has warned it will result in the destruction of up to 100 rock engravings dating back thousands of years.

It says continued industrial activity on Burrup would further damage rock artefacts, several thousand of which have been destroyed or piled up in a fenced compound over two decades to make way for the North West Shelf project and a fertiliser plant in Burrup's industrial precinct.

Only 30 per cent of the peninsula, which is scattered with ancient carvings etched on the face of large boulders, has been surveyed by archeologists. Eight large sites have already been nominated for the National Heritage Register.

Federal Environment Minister Ian Campbell received a report on the Burrup yesterday from the Australian Heritage Council, which he will consider before deciding if all or part of the peninsula and surrounding Dampier Archipelago should be listed on the register.

Responding to reports that the federal Government wished to work with Western Australia on a management plan, Premier Alan Carpenter said yesterday he would welcome any joint plan that would allow the development to proceed. He reiterated that heritage listing the Burrup would have severe economic consequences for the nation.