



Speech type: **Question and motion to take note of answer**

Date: **Tuesday, 10 October 2006**

Questioning the future of the Burrup

Senator SIEWERT (2.37 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator Ian Campbell. I refer to the minister's decision to delay the addition of the Burrup Peninsula rock art province to the National Heritage List in order to carry out further consultation. Is the minister concerned that further destruction of rock art could occur during this period? Does the minister agree that, until such time as his decision is finalised, there should be no further destruction or disturbance of rock art or any other sites inside the proposed area for listing by the Australian Heritage Council?

Senator IAN CAMPBELL—I thank Senator Siewert for the question. This is an incredibly important issue for Australia: the Burrup Peninsula and, more broadly, the Dampier Archipelago, which is an absolutely outstanding region in terms of its natural beauty but also because of the outstanding cultural heritage that is quite obvious to anyone who visits there, and also to those who would read the report prepared by the Australian Heritage Commission in relation to the petroglyphs or, in layman's language, ancient rock art.

There is art on the rocks right across the Dampier Archipelago, which spreads for a distance of roughly 200 miles north to south and potentially 40 or 50 miles east-west—a massive area. There are literally thousands upon thousands of pieces of art. That does not reduce the significance of any piece of it. It dates back to 6,000, 7,000, 8,000, 9,000, 10,000 years ago. It is, as Senator Siewert knows—because I am sure she has visited the site on more than one occasion, as I know a number of other senators have—really quite an awesome experience to be exposed to the work of mankind from so many millennia ago. And it is very much the aim of the major economic stakeholders, the Australian government and, indeed, the state government, to see a very sound and sensible management plan put in place that will deliver for Australia and the world a range of benefits from that incredibly important region.

As a number of senators would know, the region is not only home to ancient rock art from previous civilisations. It is also the home of a multi-billion dollar industry based around not only the natural gas that flows off the North West Shelf of Western Australia but also the iron ore that comes out of that province and is shipped through the port at Dampier.

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That is a multi-billion dollar industry—and, I think I can confidently predict, will be a multi-trillion dollar industry over a period of time—that has benefits to Australia’s economy but also substantial benefits to the substantial challenge of addressing climate change in the world. I make the point that, when we are looking at the protection of the rock art, when we are looking at the development of the Burrup, we need to ensure that there is a long-term plan in place for the protection of the rock art. That is something that I hope to achieve for a long-term period. I want to work with the state government to put a protection regime in place, a management plan in place, which will ensure that there is minimal interruption or damage done to the rock art, but also that we protect and do not put any new impediments in the way of development of the Burrup Peninsula and, particularly, the natural gas exports.

Every time you substitute a tonne of coal burned in China or in Korea or oil burned in North America with natural gas from the North West Shelf, you reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of the globe by 40 to 60 per cent. We know that greenhouse gas emissions are a substantial problem—probably the No. 1 environmental issue facing the planet—and Australia makes a wonderful contribution to reducing global greenhouse gas emissions by exporting that natural gas. And anyone who wants to put more impediments in the way of exporting that natural gas is defeating one of the really substantial aids in this global challenge to the environment. So I want to put in place a regime that protects the rock art for the long term and puts a management plan in place. I think more and more Australians will visit that precinct—

Senator SIEWERT—I ask a supplementary question, Mr President. I noticed the minister did not answer my first question, so maybe he could answer that and this one at the same time. What action does the minister propose to take in the event that Woodside or any other party moves to destroy rock art or other heritage sites within the boundaries proposed by the Australian Heritage Council?

Senator IAN CAMPBELL—I will address that issue. I sought to address it by saying that there are thousands and thousands of pieces of rock art. The issue is a matter for the state government at the moment, until we put a listing in place, but I am saying to the Senate and the people of Australia that we want to have a listing process that ensures that all of the major issues are addressed. There are substantial economic and environmental benefits to be gained for Australia and for the world by ensuring that we do not put any new impediments in the way of the expansion of natural gas exports to the world.

I thought the Greens cared about greenhouse gas emissions and global warming. The Australian government cares about that as much as we care about the rock art. You can

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actually jog and chew gum: you can actually, if you work hard, try to save the world from global greenhouse gas emissions and global warming by exporting natural gas out of north-west Australia. You can do that. You can also, if you work with the state government and the major economic stakeholders, put in place a long-term plan to protect the rock art. *(Time expired)*

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia) (3.26 p.m.)—

When I asked the Minister for the Environment and Heritage what he was going to do to protect the rock art on the Burrup Peninsula from development, he said that he did not want to see any new impediment to development on the Burrup. This is the minister for heritage. Perhaps he should be the minister for development, not the minister for heritage.

The Burrup Peninsula and the Dampier rock art precinct are of unique world importance. Early this month, the national Heritage Council issued its report on the values of the rock art. It made it clear in no uncertain terms that this rock art deserves to be on the National Heritage List. What is more, the council proposed a very significant boundary, excluding the current development but including everything else that remains on the Burrup. The council was very clear. I would like to quote from its report. The Australian Heritage Council said of the Burrup:

It is one of the densest concentrations of rock engravings in Australia, with some sites containing thousands or tens of thousands of images.

And it said of the engravings that they:

... provide an outstanding visual record of the course of Australia's cultural history through the Aboriginal responses to the rise of sea levels at the end of the last Ice Age.

Further, the area was described as having an outstanding potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the nation's cultural history.

Most people understandably focus on the rock art, but the report also notes a high density of standing stones, stone pits and circular stone arrangements. These range from single monoliths to extensive alignments comprising at least 300 or 400 standing stones.

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On the basis of this evidence, we Greens believe that the minister should have moved immediately to list this area on the National Heritage List, where it truly belongs. But what did we see? Just prior to when he should have made an announcement on what he was proposing to do about the Burrup, he made an announcement that he would seek further consultation about this extremely important area. In the meantime, the Western Australian government is proposing to further develop the Burrup.

What I wanted to know today was how the minister intended to protect this nationally significant rock art while he undertook this consultation. You would have thought that this was a legitimate question. Here is the minister for heritage, who I believe has responsibilities for protecting the heritage of Australia, deciding to further consult on an area that the Australian Heritage Council truly believes should be listed on the national list. He chooses to further consult. Wouldn't you have thought that he would put in place provisions to protect this rock art while he consulted?

He acknowledges it is of national significance but chooses to further consult. It is rather like Nero fiddling while Rome burns. While the minister consults to see how he can best protect this heritage, the rock art of the Burrup is under threat. As I said, one would have thought that he would have moved to have protected that area. When I asked today what he was intending to do with it, he could not answer. He could not answer what he intended to do to protect the Burrup. I believe that he should make perfectly clear what he intends to do. Does he acknowledge that rock art will be destroyed? Site A of the Woodside Pluto development contains significant rock art that will be destroyed if the Woodside proposal goes ahead. The state government is considering this proposal. Therefore, rock art will be destroyed while the minister is consulting. I urge the minister to reconsider his approach to this rock art and to at least offer a level of protection to the rock art while he is deciding the boundary of the area that he is proposing to list. It seems difficult for the minister to comprehend this.

It is not a choice of rock art or development. That development can go elsewhere. There are at least three other sites that this development can go ahead in. So it is not a case of rock art or development; we can have both. We can have both if the minister facilitates discussion between the developers, the state and the Commonwealth. That way we can protect the rock art of the Burrup and have development, the thing the minister says he wants. He could have both. The minister for heritage could have both.

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