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Ancient rock art to be protected

ANCIENT rock art on the Burrup peninsular in northern Western Australia will be protected, Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull says.

Mr Turnbull said the 241 sq km area in the Dampier Archipelago included 99 per cent of the land where rock art was known to exist.

Rock art on the remaining 1 per cent will continue to be protected under WA legislation.

Experts believe the rock art on the peninsula in the state's remote northwest, is among the oldest in the world, with some of the art dating back 30,000 years.

Greens Senator Rachel Siewert, Labor MP Carmen Lawrence and Independent MP Peter Andren welcomed the heritage listing but accused Mr Turnbull of lacking the courage to protect all the petroglyphs.

Some of the carvings have been moved to accommodate initial work at Woodside Petroleum's proposed \$10 billion liquefied natural gas project, dubbed Pluto.

"The minister's belated decision to recognise the undisputed heritage values of the Dampier Archipelago and the Burrup Peninsula comes too late to stop the damage that has occurred, and is sadly framed to allow further damage," the trio said.

"It would have taken uncommon courage for the minister to protect the full scope of the Burrup art against the wishes of Woodside Energy.

"Unfortunately, he hasn't shown that courage."

They called on Woodside and the West Australian Government to relocate the Pluto gas plant.