

ABORIGINAL GROUP SEEKS COMMONWEALTH DECLARATION TO PREVENT WOODSIDE'S PLUTO DEVELOPMENT ON 'AREA B'

Disappointed by the refusal of the Western Australian State Government to adequately protect their heritage on the Burrup Peninsula, the Wong-Goo-Tt-Oo native title group, which includes traditional owners of lands between the George and Fortescue Rivers on the coastal plains of WA's Pilbara and adjacent islands, has lodged applications under Sections 9 and 10 of the Commonwealth *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act* seeking a Ministerial Declaration that, if successful, would effectively prevent gas giant Woodside from siting an LNG Plant at the site known as Area B on the Burrup Peninsula.

"Woodside and the State have left us no alternative", said group elder and spokesman Wilfred Hicks.

"The intrusion of Woodside's planned development on Area B on the Burrup must rank as one of the worst incidents of the destruction of aboriginal heritage and world class rock art in Australia. The destruction of our country is now out of control, with Woodside preparing, with the active assistance of the State Government, for the wholesale destruction of hundreds of ancient engravings that link us spiritually with our ancestors, by developing the Pluto Project on Area B". "Engravings not destroyed will be closed off to us behind barricades and fences", he added.

The Wong-Goo-Tt-Oo group, which cooperates with other mining corporations such as Pilbara Iron (RIO TINTO), and BHP, etc in amending and realigning development plans in order to protect engraving and other cultural sites, has consistently opposed development of Area B.

Their opposition grew after they carried out heritage surveys of Area B in 2005/6 and identified hundreds of engravings whose existence had been previously unknown to Woodside and the State. "Enough is enough", said Mr Hicks, "Woodside originally asked us to approve the LNG Plant on the site of the former Hearson Village known as areas E & D. We agreed to that, as it would not have resulted in wanton destruction of our culture. But now they want to build the Plant on Area B, which was previously undisturbed, and destroy engravings that are significant to our songs and ceremonies. We cannot stand by and allow this to happen".

The Wong-Goo-Tt-Oo had hoped that their heritage would be protected under the WA *Aboriginal Heritage Act*, but in February 2007 Minister Roberts overruled the independent Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee (appointed to protect significant aboriginal heritage sites) whose recommendation was not to grant permission for Woodside's Pluto LNG Plant to be built in Area B.

"This Act", said Mr Hicks, "and the State procedures are not protecting Aboriginal heritage. Since the present State Government has held office, the Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee has considered 238 Section 18 applications to disturb heritage sites. The Committee has only recommended that four of these be refused (one of these being Pluto Site B); of the four recommended to be refused by the Committee, only one has been refused by the Minister".

The Wong-Goo-Tt-Oo believe that Area B, where the gas giant intends to build its plant, is a significant Aboriginal area in accordance with their traditions, observances, customs and beliefs. "Engravings on the rocks in Area B refer directly to our current ceremonies", Mr Hicks said. "Disturbance of these spiritual forces will lead directly to

illness and death in our communities. The State Government has turned its back on protecting aboriginal heritage sites and world class rock art in favor of what Woodside wants to do that's why we have sought a fair review from Minister Turnbull and the Commonwealth Government and that is why we have made these applications under the Commonwealth heritage legislation".

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CALL WILFRED HICKS ON 0417923705.