

Rock art not so solid

by JENNY D'ANGER

BURRUP rock art and the battle to preserve it has come to Fremantle with three Pilbara Aboriginal groups in town to lobby politicians.

Fremantle lawyer Stephen Walker and East Fremantle anthropologist Stephen Bennetts, members of the Friends of Australian Rock Art (FARA), have also thrown their weight behind the campaign.

They're looking at legal challenges after the government overturned its own Aboriginal heritage protection order to allow Woodside to build on the Burrup. This was despite international screams it would destroy the world's oldest and largest collection of rock art.

With Woodside looking at extending its liquid gas operations on the peninsula with the Pluto II plant, and plans for an explosives factory and fertiliser plant right next door, the groups are worried about the art's future.

"These companies were allocated land before we were even talked to," Ngarluma community member Robyne Churnside said. Fears were further fuelled by the recent gas explosion at Apache's operations on Varanus Island because a similar event at either plant would take out the rock art, she said.

Ms Churnside was scathing of claims by Woodside that ancient rock art hadn't

been destroyed – just moved.

"My people say that once a piece of rock art left by our ancestors is removed our song line, our sacred site is destroyed forever."

Fremantle Aboriginal playwright and muso David Milroy, brother of Sally Morgan, said the Woodside plant made a farce of the Aboriginal Protection Act.

"It's the first time in WA history heritage protection was lifted," he said, adding bitterly that the minister for Indigenous affairs at the time had also been the arts minister.

Yindjibarndi women Michelle Adams said mining was emptying the Mill Stream aquaafa which supplied water for the top end of WA.



• Michelle Adams, David Milroy and Robyne Churnside fear Burrup rock art could be toast. Photo by Jenny D'ANGER