

Taskforce to study Burrup rock art threat
Friday, 28 June 2002

A TASKFORCE will study new research which says the world's largest collection of ancient rock art is at risk of being destroyed within 33 years because of proposed industrial development.

An international expert on rock art said the unique and extensive collection of petroglyphs on Western Australia's Burrup Peninsula would be eroded by industrial emissions by 2035 unless future development was stopped.

Petroglyphs are drawings or carvings on rock.

Robert Bednarik, president of the International Federation of Rock Art Organisations, said earlier this month that some of the rock art was up to 10,500 years old, and no management plan had been put in place for the area.

Burrup is home to Woodside Petroleum's North-West Shelf project and further development worth around \$6 billion is proposed, which Mr Bednarik says will result in a trebling of industrial emissions.

West Australian State Development Minister Clive Brown said today the government was setting up an expert working group to examine the methodology and implications of the research.

Mr Brown said Mr Bednarik's report suggested the rock art would be damaged or even disappear this century and that greater emission levels from industry would only expedite this.

"It isn't a matter of suggesting that somehow these projects are going to have an impact which, according to the report, isn't already going to happen anyway," Mr Brown said.

"No-one is suggesting that Woodside Petroleum or Hamersley Iron or any of those places be closed down.

"So then it becomes a question of 'if that science is there, what can be done'."

Mr Brown said the Department of Minerals and Petroleum Resources was setting up an expert working group to study Mr Bednarik's report.

"It's important, there's no question at all about that," Mr Brown said.

"Obviously, you want to preserve the history of the area, and if we didn't consider it important we wouldn't be getting an expert group together."