

Rock art threatened by industry - Fund
By Holly Nott
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CONTINUED industrial development on Western Australia's Burrup Peninsula could lead to the destruction of globally significant Aboriginal rock art, a heritage lobbyist said yesterday.

The New York-based World Monuments Fund has included the 10,000-year-old carved petroglyphs of the coastal Pilbara region on its list of the world's 100 most endangered sites.

But Fund president Bonnie Burnham, who visited the "staggering" 80 square kilometre site yesterday, said industrial expansion and emissions were threatening its future.

"I've never really seen a site of that magnitude and complexity and compactness with rock art," she told ABC radio.

"Often rock art works are dispersed over a very large area. Finding so many resources here in ... such an impressive landscape was just an extraordinary experience.

"I certainly feel that this is a site of global cultural significance and because rock art sites are so rare and these resources are so ancient, they really do represent a level of priority for the international community."

State Development Minister Clive Brown has said a WA Green's plan to shut down industry in the area to protect the carvings would wreck the State's industrial reputation.

"People need to realise that the Greens' plan to shut down industry on the Burrup would see Woodside's North West Shelf project and Hamersley Iron's iron ore operations closed down," Mr Brown said.

"This would cost tens of thousands of jobs and make WA a laughing stock among international investors."

Ms Burnham said her attempts to arrange a meeting with the government had so far been unsuccessful.

"We understand that the (State Government's) strategy is really based on continuing with the development in the peninsula," she said.

"I think that would be a tragic decision.

"Maybe there is some hesitance to acknowledge that contemporary development and the preservation of these resources are not compatible objectives."

Ms Burnham said there should at least be a moratorium on industrial expansion until a four-year state government study into the rock art's future is finalised.

WA Greens MLC Robin Chapple, who toured the site with Ms Burnham, said he was glad the peninsula had gained world attention.

"Of course there will be challenges to be overcome in promoting responsible development in the region, but this should not be at the cost of heritage icons with values equivalent to The Great Wall of China, or Shackleton's hut in the Antarctic," he said.

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