

Strategy rethink required for Burrup

Peter Roberts's "Burrup blues: \$900m project under threat" (January 20) scratches the surface as to why Burrup is not progressing.

Development on Burrup Peninsula near Karratha has been a contentious issue for many years. Burrup is a very rocky, hilly and cramped site full of heritage and ecological issues.

The West Australian government has been warned many times that its Burrup development strategy is seriously flawed. It has been requested on numerous occasions to change the strategy and develop alternative locations nearby — and this was before it committed itself to spending a significant portion of the \$183 million on Burrup.

Karratha and surrounds is a multi-billion dollar resource hub for the export of iron ore, salt, oil and gas; an ideal location for downstream processing if the right development strategy could be put in place.

The WA government has blown opportunities because of its

inflexibility and dogmatism in sticking to its decade-old Burrup plan. The finger can be pointed directly at officers in the Department of Industry and Resources and its predecessors. Their attitude has been similar to the old-fashioned schoolmaster complete with severe caning if one is deemed naughty.

Burrup is probably the worst location in the region to locate major industrial development for two basic reasons: cost and heritage.

Burrup is a low infrastructure cost site for the government; a very high development cost site for project proponents. Proponents have always complained about the high costs. The government will not listen, not even to its own experts and consultants.

Arguably, Burrup contains the world's largest and most diverse aboriginal rock art gallery plus Australia's largest collection of stone arrangements. Consequently a global campaign is being waged to deter proponents from developing

on Burrup. For example, the proposed siting of the Woodside Pluto project on Burrup is now coming under pressure.

To resolve these problems, the large nearby Maitland site was identified for major industry development. But it's a high cost site for the government and a much lower cost site for project proponents. The government has been actively deterring proponents from considering the Maitland site. Another site is at Onslow; again the government has been pushing proponents back onto Burrup to help justify its \$183 million-plus investment.

The effects of escalating construction costs, rising gas prices and export demands destroying the economics of producing downstream products locally could all have been mitigated if the government had got its overall strategy right.

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