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The World Today - Campbell seeks compromise between heritage and industry

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Reporter: Lynn Bell

ELEANOR HALL: The Minister for Heritage and the Environment, Senator Ian Campbell, says some pieces of Burrup's art will have to be sacrificed for development.

He's been speaking about the heritage proposal to Lynn Bell in Canberra.

IAN CAMPBELL: I think, having visited there a couple of times, it's fair to say that it's likely that there are important values associated with that peninsula. But equally so, there are very important economic and environmental benefits to be gained from ensuring the continuing expansion, for example, of the export of natural gas from that province.

LYNN BELL: The National Trust in Western Australia is concerned that Woodside Petroleum could be given approval to remove 12 per cent of the rock art on a site that they have earmarked for a new processing plant for its Pluto gas project. Is that a possibility?

IAN CAMPBELL: Well, I know that Woodside are planning the Pluto project, and that's an incredibly important project for Australia and also for the world.

We've got to remember that when you export natural gas from the Burrup, you are reducing greenhouse gas emissions by roughly 50 to 60 per cent. Every kind of gas you export is a 50 to 60 per cent reduction in the greenhouse gas emissions if you're replacing coal or oil.

So there are huge economic and environmental benefits from the Burrup that need to be weighed against the important heritage values. And we must remember there are thousands upon thousands of pieces of petroglyph and rock art up there.

LYNN BELL: Now, Woodside Petroleum operates the North West Shelf gas project there. It's worth about \$19 billion. Obviously it's key to the economy. If Woodside wants to press ahead with new developments, particularly with gas, how do you then go in to bat for the preservation of the heritage and the thousands of ancient rock art pieces there?

IAN CAMPBELL: Well, it is a very large precinct. I mean, people seem to have it in their mind that by Woodside's expansion and the Pluto project going ahead, in some way you're wiping out the entire area. It is a massive precinct, with rock art spread across literally dozens of miles.

My strong view is that the heritage values can co-exist with the expansion of the very important economic and environmental activity that companies like Woodside are proposing there.

LYNN BELL: What exactly does that mean? Does that mean that you're willing to sacrifice some pieces of rock art to advance some pieces of industry?

IAN CAMPBELL: Well, what it means is we need a sensible plan to ensure that you can have both. And there's no reason why you can't have both.

We have had tremendous economic development on the Burrup over recent decades, which has meant billions of dollars for industry, thousands of jobs for Australians, but also, as I've said, a massive contribution to reducing the world's greenhouse gas emissions. I mean...

LYNN BELL: But how do you have both if there is rock art on a site designated for an expansion of the Pluto gas project? How do you find that balance?

IAN CAMPBELL: Well, you have to find the balance. You cannot possibly have an exclusion in your policy that says because... you know, no one in their right mind would propose saving every single last bit of heritage on the Peninsula, unless they wanted to close down the economic development of Australia.

LYNN BELL: So you're saying that not every piece of the ancient rock art deserves to be saved?

IAN CAMPBELL: It is a practical reality that every piece of rock art cannot be saved, if Australia's economic development and the environmental benefits that flow from selling natural gas to the rest of the world are going to be realised.

But I am absolutely certain that a very excellent outcome can be achieved for both Australia's cultural heritage, and for our economic development, and for the environmental (inaudible) the globe that comes from replacing coal and oil burning facilities in our region with (inaudible) from the North West Shelf.

LYNN BELL: So even though the Australian Heritage Council's preliminary report that was written in May last year said the whole peninsula qualified for national and world heritage listing, you don't believe that every piece can be saved?

IAN CAMPBELL: I'm absolutely certain that there will have to be a compromise reached, and that compromise will see some of the rock art moved. And that has been what has occurred in recent years.

Can we ensure we've got a better heritage regime than we've had in the past? I'm also absolutely certain of that.

LYNN BELL: When does the Government expect to strike an agreement with the WA Government over how to move forward?

IAN CAMPBELL: Well, we've been working with the WA Government for some months now. I met with the WA minister last week, and we will be working to get a win-win situation for Australia's economic development, for the environmental greenhouse gas benefits of the world, and also heritage.

But it's important to get that agreement right. We're looking at creating certainty for the economy, and for heritage, over a 30, 40, 50-year time span.

ELEANOR HALL: That's the Minister for Heritage and the Environment, Senator Ian Campbell, speaking to Lynn Bell in Canberra.