

Gas project allowed near Aboriginal site

15sep06

THE Western Australian Government will allow Woodside Petroleum to develop a new gas installation in the Pilbara provided it moves part of it away from a massive Aboriginal rock art collection.

WA Indigenous Affairs Minister Sheila McHale today said she would give Woodside the go-ahead if it can reroute a transportation pipe and access road away from the rock art and ceremonial sites in the area.

Ms McHale has endorsed a recommendation by the WA's key advisory body on indigenous heritage, the Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee, to protect the rock art.

The Minister said the decision allowed the project to proceed, while ensuring the protection of some of the areas most significant Aboriginal heritage sites.

"Aboriginal people feel very strongly that parts of the proposed development area are of such cultural significance that they should not be disturbed," Ms McHale said in a statement.

The conditions will require Woodside to find an alternative location for its gas pipe and access road, Ms McHale said.

"In other areas, Woodside will need to provide suitable facilities for the short and long-term storage of salvaged materials and work with Aboriginal people to develop a Cultural Heritage Management Plan," she said.

Australian Greens leader Bob Brown said Ms McHale had made a terrible decision.

"It will lead to further erosion of the integrity of one of the world's great rock art sites, which Minister McHale should be nominating for World Heritage rather than sentencing the Burrup peninsula to further destruction," Mr Brown said.

He called on federal Environment Minister Ian Campbell to override the decision until a World Heritage assessment had been completed.