

Ruling protects ancient rock art

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WOODSIDE Petroleum must reroute a gas pipeline and road away from Aboriginal rock art if it wants to proceed with a multi-billion-dollar gas development on the Burrup Peninsula in Western Australia.

The ruling yesterday by state Indigenous Affairs Minister Sheila McHale will exclude Woodside's new liquefied natural gas project, in the far northwest of the state, from a 30ha area containing about 225 engraved motifs.

Woodside accepted the minister's decision, required under the Aboriginal Heritage Act, saying it was always the intention to avoid as much rock art as possible and move any that could not be avoided.

A spokeswoman said Woodside believed it could find acceptable routes for the pipeline and access road and would continue talks with indigenous groups on options for the final layout for the project.

The ancient rock art has been a thorn in Woodside's proposed development of the Pluto gasfield, 190km northwest of Karratha. The plan includes an offshore production system and platform, a 200km pipeline to shore, and an onshore gas processing plant, storage facilities and export jetty.

Ms McHale said the decision would allow "this important industrial decision to proceed, while ensuring the protection of some of the area's most significant indigenous heritage sites".