

Woodside nod to destroy or move rock art

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The State Government has given Woodside approval to destroy or move ancient Pilbara rock art, the first of several approvals needed for the \$5 billion Pluto LNG project to go ahead.

Indigenous Affairs Minister Sheila McHale said yesterday it would allow Woodside to move or destroy some Aboriginal rock art in the Burrup Peninsula so that the company could build wharf and storage facilities on the coast to support its overall project.

The only condition for Woodside was that it had to reroute a pipe and access road so that less rock art would be disturbed.

Up to 150 rock art panels could be affected by the wharf and storage facilities, although Woodside said that it would aim to limit disturbance as much as possible. "This approval keeps us on track to start LNG production by the end of 2010," a Woodside spokeswoman said.

Ms McHale's approval comes less than two weeks after the Environment Protection Authority gave its general support for the clearing of the coastal site, including the disturbance of rock art. The EPA's recommendations must now get WA and Federal Government approval.

Other approvals needed include environmental approval for the overall project, approval to disturb rock art on a second site for the gas treatment plant, as well as planning and development approvals.

National Trust's WA chief executive officer Thomas Perrigo said he was likely to appeal against yesterday's decision because any disturbance would damage the area which had World Heritage significance.

"It's unacceptable that only some of the art would be protected," Mr Perrigo said. "She's allowing the destruction of art which goes against the Aboriginal Heritage Act that is supposed to be protecting it."

Greens Senator Bob Brown called on Federal Environment Minister Ian Campbell to assess the site for World Heritage listing.

Ms McHale said while it was necessary to disturb some rock art pieces, the southern part of the site would remain a "no-go" zone as requested by Aboriginal communities. "If we want to have any development, then it's virtually impossible not to (affect) Aboriginal sites in some way," she said.