

## Woodside told to move pipeline for art's sake

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**SYDNEY** Woodside Petroleum, Australia's second-largest oil and gas producer, has been told by the government to reroute a gas pipeline and access roadway for its proposed liquefied natural gas project in Pluto in order to avert damage to indigenous rock drawings.

The move will protect indigenous art and ceremonial sites on the Burrup Peninsula, the Western Australian indigenous affairs minister, Sheila McHale, said Friday in a statement on the state government's Web site. The Pluto LNG project will be granted heritage approval provided the pipe and road are moved, she said.

The board of Woodside last month approved 192 million Australian dollars, or \$145 million, of spending to start engineering work on Pluto, which will involve an initial production unit of between five million and six million metric tons a year. The Australian Greens Party last month asked Prime Minister John Howard to protect the rock paintings, which are as old as 40,000 years.

"The conditions will require Woodside to find an alternative location for its gas pipe and access road," McHale said in the statement. "Aboriginal people feel very strongly that parts of the proposed development area are of such cultural significance that they should not be disturbed."

The minister's ruling means that about two-thirds of a square kilometer in the southern area of a site to be used for storage and loading systems must not be disturbed, protecting 225 individual engraved motifs.

The decision allows some leeway for some other indigenous drawings to be moved, said Les Faulds, a spokesman for McHale. "Without that flexibility, basically the project couldn't go ahead," Faulds said.

Woodside's latest preferred layout for the Pluto project avoids 90 percent of the rock drawings in the lease area and does not use the area the minister has ruled must be left undisturbed, said Hannah Fitzhardinge, a spokeswoman at the company.

"We believe we can find an acceptable route for the pipeline and access road and will continue our discussions with indigenous groups on options for the final layout," she said.

Woodside is due next year to approve the project, which the company's chief executive officer, Don Voelte, said last month could end up being a bigger earner for the company than the North West Shelf venture upon start-up. The project still requires environmental approval, as well as a further heritage approval for a second site to be used on the Burrup Peninsula.

"With this approval now in place we can commence site preparations for the storage and loading facilities as soon as we have environmental approval, which we anticipate later this year," Fitzhardinge said.