

Slow progress in assessing ancient work could breach agreement



Under threat: Survey work on rock art like this on the Burrup Peninsula is well behind schedule

Projects at risk if rock art deal fails

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Development on the Burrup Peninsula could be jeopardised if the State Government breaches an agreement with Pilbara Aboriginal communities over surveying ancient rock art, the National Trust has warned.

National Trust WA chief executive Tom Perrigo said that under the Burrup and Maitland industrial estate agreement signed three years ago, the Government agreed that all rock art on the Burrup Peninsula would be surveyed by 2008.

But Mr Perrigo said the survey work was well behind schedule and it would be nearly impossible to complete it by 2008. "There's about 500,000 pieces of rock art in the Burrup and there's no way the Government can complete this survey in time, which will make this agreement null and void," he said.

Mr Perrigo said a letter from one



Ancient art: Some of the rock paintings on the Burrup.

of the Aboriginal groups had been sent to Alan Carpenter recently to warn him that the Government risked breaching its agreement. The agreement allows development in parts of the region as long as the Government and developers adhere to conditions including survey work.

Concerns over the agreement comes after a decision on Friday by

Indigenous Affairs Minister Sheila McHale to give Woodside approval to destroy or move rock art up to 20,000 years old. It is the first of several approvals that Woodside needs for its \$5 billion Pluto LNG project.

Ms McHale said yesterday she expected the survey work to be done by 2008. She said in most cases where Aboriginal cultural sites could be disturbed under the Aboriginal Heritage Act, stringent conditions were imposed to protect and preserve sites "to the greatest extent possible".

But a study published last week by WA scientists Caroline Bird and Sylvia Hallam criticised the Act and said it was "disastrous for heritage conservation". They said comprehensive survey work of the entire area was required urgently.

Traditional land owner Wilfred Hicks, of the Wong-Goo-Tt-Oo people, said moving any rock art was an assault on Aboriginal culture.