

BURRUP Federal Govt urged to protect ancient WA rock art

2006-10-26 11:04 AM +0800

by [Elliot K - Perth Indymedia](#)

OCTOBER 26 2006: The International Federation of Rock Art has told a Senate committee that rock art in the Kimberley and Pilbara, should be immediately placed under Commonwealth control. The group says the Western Australian Government has failed to ensure the protection of it's cultural heritage. As well as being home to the biggest collection of rock art on the planet, the Burrup is now home to the massive \$5-billion Woodside Pluto gas plant...

The International Federation of Rock Art has made a submission to a committee investigating the management of national parks which is due to report to the Senate in February. Convenor Robert Bednarik says successive state governments have allowed the destruction of thousands of rock carvings to make way for industrial development in the Pilbara.

The Burrup Peninsula is home to the world's largest collection of rock art, which dates back at least 7,000 years, some say as long as 20,000. But for the last 40 years, it's had to coexist with heavy industry. Robert Bednarik says 20 per cent of the art has already been destroyed. He says the Kimberley's rock art is only being protected by its remoteness.

"Fortunately at the present time there is no major industrial development up there, but in the future that may well happen and if it did happen and it's the same conditions that apply today in Western Australia will also apply in the Kimberley, so no protection for our cultural heritage," he said.

Earlier this month CSIRO study reported that the rock art on the Burrup Peninsula, in north-west WA, is not being affected by industrial projects.

The Rock Art Monitoring Committee chairman Frank Murray said during the first year of the study, CSIRO scientists found the air quality to be better than Perth. Professor Murray says the scientists also found the art had not been affected.

"We found no clear change in colour of the rock art over the period of the monitoring which is a 12 month period, but we're continuing to monitor for the four year period and we saw no changes to the mineralogy of the rock or in the microbial activity on the rock surface," he said.

However, the National Trust of WA says the report is outdated because the monitoring stations have not been working. Trust spokesman Robin Chapple says the report was funded by the State Government and industry and does not provide a true indication of current pollution levels.

"The key issue I suppose for us is that the monitoring stations haven't been working now for quite some time and have obviously missed the recent emissions from Burrup Fertilisers," he said.

The International Federation of Rock Art Organisations says the ancient art is most certainly at risk. Robert Bednarik is not convinced by the results of the scientific study.

"They can certainly make conclusions about the quantity of emissions being detected, but they cannot in one year make any conclusions about the possible damage to the rock art, not even in four years," he said.

Professor Iain Davidson an archaeologist appointed by Woodside says

"We know of the damage to several hundred engravings, which was sanctioned by the State Government at the time the Woodside plant was set up." He sees no desire by government to remove a billion dollar plant. "The rock art can't go anywhere else." Dr Davidson, says "nothing can stop the plant."

Australian Greens leader, senator Bob Brown has branded the claim false. "The Burrup, ought to be protected in its entirety. The National Heritage Council clearly stated that the Burrup is a site of outstanding national heritage values to the nation," Senator Brown said. "There is no reason to withhold protection for the ancient rock art any longer."

Senator Brown said Senator Campbell should resign as environment minister if he could not protect the Burrup. "Senator Campbell is the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, not the minister for Woodside Petroleum," he said.

"There are alternative sites for Woodside's gas plant, but no alternative for the rock art."