

WA drops opposition to Burrup listing

November 28, 2006 - 8:15PM

Western Australia has dropped its opposition to national heritage listing of ancient rock art at the north-west Burrup Peninsula.

Hundreds of thousands of petroglyphs, or rock carvings, dating back to the last Ice Age, are estimated to be at the site which is being considered for heritage listing by Federal Environment Minister Ian Campbell.

Until now, heritage listing was opposed by the WA government, which wanted to foster industry in the region, and Woodside Petroleum, which wanted to build a gas project on the Burrup Peninsula.

But both changed their minds on Tuesday following proposed changes to federal environment laws that they say would allow Burrup's rock art to coexist with industry.

Mr Carpenter said without the proposed changes any third party could take out an injunction against activities on the peninsula in the name of protecting the rock art "and while that injunction was in place no activity could take place at all".

"Today, I have notified the federal government that we have dropped our opposition to heritage listing of Burrup rock art," Mr Carpenter said.

Senator Campbell has put forward amendments to the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act with the aim of streamlining environmental approvals processes, including heritage listing.

Under the proposal management plans and heritage boundaries would be put in place before heritage listing takes place.

Woodside said its change of position is conditional upon management plans being put in place first, and on a 6.8 square kilometre section of the peninsula being excised to build the gas plant.

Senator Campbell welcomed Woodside's change of heart.

"It doesn't surprise me ... I've always thought you design the management plan, come to an agreement on the boundary and then put the heritage listing in place as the more intuitive, sensible, practical thing to do," he said.

Senator Campbell said he believed the amendments would be passed within weeks.

He would not say when his decision on heritage listing would be made but said Woodside's apparent backflip would not influence the outcome.