

The Editor
The West Australian.

6 December 2006

Dear Editor

Today's "West" reports moves by Carmen Lawrence, Rachel Siewert and Peter Andren to protect rock carvings on the Burrup Peninsula as a "Heritage bid" which "puts Pluto in doubt".

This claim is quite unwarranted.

The gas sources, including Pluto, do not lie on nor immediately offshore from the Burrup Peninsula. THERE ARE **NO** MINERALS ON BURRUP, nor anywhere in the Dampier Archipelago. The peninsula comprises rugged uplands, dissected by narrow gorges and steep-sided valleys, quite unsuitable for industrial installations, and requiring extensive and expensive re-shaping of the landscape to make construction possible. The only small flat area lies on silted-up tidal flats between King Bay and Hearson Cove, vulnerable to tsunamis or rising sea level. The original plans for industry, drawn up in the 1960s, were just lines ruled on the map, obviously by draftsmen who had never set foot on the canyon-dissected massifs of Burrup. All industrial development on Burrup has been difficult and expensive; and there is no room for a substantial development of ancillary industries.

Any really substantial Northwest development, and the economic future of WA, must locate elsewhere.

The Pluto field is roughly equidistant from the Burrup and from Onslow. It lies at the eastern end of a string of gas fields running westward towards Northwest Cape, forming an arc more than 100km offshore, centred on Onslow. Around Onslow lie large expanses of featureless spinifex plain, offering more convenient, extensive, locations for industrial expansion, cheaper in construction effort, and not hemmed in by industrially useless rocky massifs.

The topographic and geological diversity of the Dampier Archipelago in general, and Burrup in particular, spawned comparable biological diversity, supported visits by diverse Aboriginal groups over tens of thousands of years, and provided rock faces for the amazing richness of art which provide an index of their religious activities from the earliest settlement of the Australian continent, through to the coming of Europeans. The Onslow area has no comparable geological, biological and archaeological richness.

BHP / Billeton plans to bring its natural gas onshore in the Onslow area. Wise planning would have directed Woodside's development to that economically preferable location long ago; and WA bureaucrats should yield to reason now

There is no reason the Federal minister should compound the bureaucratic ineptitude of the WA department in the 1970s by reinforcing those errors in the new millenium. The only reason to persist is to save bureaucracy the embarrassment of admitting a gross error of judgement. WA and Woodside must eventually admit they are wrong, and move elsewhere. The Federal minister will do them a favour In the long term if he forces them to make the move sooner rather than later.

It can be win win for heritage and industry.

This generation must not be responsible for the destruction of the sacred heritage of Australia and the world - not only by the bulldozer and the crane, but by construction dust, vehicle movement, fumes, people, cars, more people, more cars, more 4WDs driving over horizontal engraved rocks, knocking against vertical rock faces, more people accidentally and deliberately defacing art and stone arrangements, etc, etc. The archipelago is an entity which should never have been desecrated. We have subjected and are subjecting the *whole* to the death of a thousand cuts. It is futile to claim "only x%" is threatened. If any part is threatened, the whole is threatened. Would we remove "only x%" of Stonehenge? or cover it in dust and fumes and the visual pollution of industrial construction close by?

Our three courageous representatives are to be congratulated on their efforts to save us from ourselves.

Yours sincerely,
Sylvia J Hallam

From - Rev Sylvia J Hallam, MA, PhD (Cantab.), FAHA
(Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities),
Retired Associate Professor of Prehistoric Archaeology;
Senior Honorary Fellow, School of Earth and Geographical Sciences, UWA,
Member of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Studies.

Unit1/133 Fairway, Nedlands WA 6009
Phone - 9386 1366