

Govt urged to protect Burrup rock art

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The federal government must ensure ancient rock carvings on Western Australia's Burrup Peninsula are heritage listed, says a top Australian archaeologist.

Hundreds of thousands of petroglyphs, or rock carvings, dating back to the last Ice Age, are estimated to be at the site in WA's north.

But Woodside Petroleum wants to place a large onshore facility on the peninsula - the former Dampier Island - to support its LNG gas production.

Professor John Mulvaney from the University of Melbourne said it was crazy the government was considering giving up the ancient carvings for the sake of development.

He has written to Federal Environment Minister Ian Campbell appealing for him to listen to the experts and protect the area as world heritage landscape.

"There have been so many experts that have advised him that the site is important and he has now left it open for the general public to comment on whether it's important or not," Professor Mulvaney told ABC radio.

"It seems to me he is going to count the letters he gets in saying yes or no, and that to my mind is hypocritical."

Prof Mulvaney said the carvings were very important historically.

"Some date from around the time sea level got back to where it is at, six or seven thousand years ago," he said.

At least 20 of the carvings, he said, are of the Tasmanian Tiger which has been extinct on the mainland for at least 3,000 years.

Others were even older and extremely striking, he said.

"They include human faces, very strange looking human faces, some of them look almost like medieval knights in armour."

Senator Campbell is due to make a decision on the site next week.