

# **Ancient rock art to be removed to make way for Australian gas project**

**Last Updated: Friday, December 22, 2006 | 11:22 AM ET**

**CBC, Canada**

A petroleum company plans to begin removing more than 150 ancient rock paintings from a site just off Australia's west coast after the federal government turned down an application for a heritage listing that would have preserved the art.

On Friday, federal Environment Minister Ian Campbell rejected an application to issue an emergency heritage listing for the Burrup Peninsula, saying a listing could hamper the oil and gas industry.

"It's important that we protect our heritage but also protect our economy, protect our jobs .... Also see natural gas being exported to the rest of the world," Campbell said.

Woodside Petroleum says it will act quickly to remove the petroglyphs from the site to make way for a \$5-billion Australian (\$4.2-billion Cdn) gas project.

Environmentalists and heritage organizations had applied for the heritage listing to protect the more than one million rock carvings on the Dampier Archipelago, a chain of islands off a remote part of Australia.

The carvings are 6,000 to 30,000 years old and chronicle the cultural heritage of ancient Aboriginal societies.

The petroglyphs are under threat because of acid rain from existing petrochemical plants in the region, and projects that involve blasting to clear the way for development, according to a report by the National Trust, a conservation organization.

Aboriginal groups have pressed for protection for the region, along with Australia's Green party.

"I'm not very happy at all because they are destroying our heritage and as I've always said, they are destroying our Bible that's lying on the Burrup," said Wong-Goo-Tt-Oo elder Wilfred Hicks.

Archeologists say there has been little study of the remote region — all the works have not been catalogued and not much is known about the ancient cultures that created them.

The rejection of the heritage listing, made after just 10 days of study by the minister, is unacceptable, said Senator Rachel Siewert, a representative of the Green party.

"This is undoubtedly a heritage site, of not only national, but of world significance, and if he can't see his duty is to protect this area — to list it and protect it — he should step down as minister because he's incapable of carrying out his duties," she said.