

## Friends of Australian Rock Art says 'no' to development on Peninsula

The Burrup rock art is believed to include some of the oldest art on the planet. It comprises one of the densest concentrations of rock art in the world, varying between hundreds and thousands of engravings in each square kilometre surveyed.

Burrup shows humankind's responses to natural changes in the environment. The earliest rituals used geometric symbols, then depictions of the land animals of the Dampier uplands. Representations of extinct species include the fat-tailed wallaby and the thylacine. Later, when sea levels approached their present levels, eight to six thousand years ago, people began to accumulate vast middens of shellfish remains, and fish and turtle bones, and to show marine creatures in their art.

As well as engraved and otherwise marked rock there are also many standing stones, reminiscent of Stonehenge, situated to indicate areas of spiritual significance.

One setting of upright stones is reported to commemorate the Flying Foam massacres of 1868, when many of the Indigenous Yaburarra people were murdered by colonial police. The Yaburarra people were largely wiped out by these massacres, and by smallpox, but their responsibilities were taken on by their neighbouring kinfolk. The Ngarluma, Yindjibarndi, and Wong-Goo-Tt-Oo peoples each claim native title rights to the country.

The art cannot be considered as a collection of individual pieces. Just as a cathedral in its surroundings cloister, chapterhouse, etc, is built up over hundreds of years, but becomes a single whole; so the Burrup is a single landscape, a spiritual and cultural entity created and maintained by Aboriginal people over tens of thousands of years.



The Burrup is listed as one of the world's 100 most endangered sites by the New York-based World Monuments Fund, and has been nominated for World Heritage and National Heritage registration.

This complex entity records the story of Australia's first settlers, shows how they coped first with global cooling and increased aridity, then with global warming, and seas that advanced over a hundred kilometres inland. It shows part of the first diaspora of modern mankind, and shows our species exhibiting a sense of the sacred, which continued and changed over tens of thousands of years. It shows Australians marking and shaping Australian landscapes. It has much to teach us about what it means to be human.

Were the site to be situated in Victoria or New South Wales, or within reasonable distance of any southern capital city, it would have been recognised as a place of national and world heritage by the mid-twentieth century. Its location 1500km from Perth has allowed its

exploitation and desecration by short-sighted bureaucratic and corporate interests.

During the 1970s, part of the Burrup was "cleared" to make way for Woodside's gas plant, the largest industrial plant in Australia. Hundreds of petroglyphs were recorded and destroyed or removed to a cyclone-fenced cage, where they have deteriorated badly. Further damage to the art is occurring as a result of industrial pollution.

The latest, most serious, threat is Woodside's proposed Pluto LNG plant. The proposed "Site A" and "Site B" developments would require the clearing of another massive area.

In January 2007, Woodside announced that it had commenced preparatory work for "clearing" art on Site A. This is despite Woodside's board having not yet made a final decision to go ahead with the Pluto project. It is also despite the fact the federal government is still considering whether to list the site on the National Heritage register. Former

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Environment Minister Ian Campbell, in rejecting Emergency National Heritage listing in December 2006, said he would not be rushed into a decision on heritage listing. Precipitate action is apparently not a concern to Woodside.

Indigenous Elders oppose destruction of their cultural heritage on the Burrup. Sadly, some Indigenous people, with no alternative sources of income and living in poverty without basic services, have taken employment monitoring rock art clearance.

Friends of Australian Rock Art (FARA) is campaigning to pressure Woodside and the WA and federal governments to abandon plans for any further development on the Burrup.

FARA does not oppose the Pluto proposal, or any other development in the region, rather, we say that Pluto and other developments should be on sites where there are no conflicting cultural and scientific interests. There are many such sites in the immediate vicinity, including vast areas of flat spinifex plain near Onslow.

FARA believes that Woodside is being pressured to maintain its plans for the Burrup so that the WA government can continue to pursue still further development on the Burrup, including a marina and other industrial plants.

The December 2006 "Stand Up" action was the first of a national and global series of similar protest actions. Two "Stand-Ups" were held outside the Woodside's head office in January 2007, the beginning of an ongoing vigil outside Woodside's offices for the rock art. The ABC and AAP carried the story, which appeared in newspapers throughout Australia, and on GWN television. The *West Australian* newspaper appears uninterested in the destruction of WA's most globally significant cultural heritage.

Stand Up events have been held in Paris (near the Eiffel Tower) and in Kastel, Germany, in February. Other events will be held in February in Perth, including two targeting the Perth meeting of APEC

mining ministers, and in other locations.

FARA is considering plans for an international convergence at the Burrup in July 2007. It also proposes to target Woodside's shareholders, joint venture partners, and financiers with an international publicity and disinvestment campaign.

FARA sees the Burrup as an example of the failure of, in particular, the West Australian government's heritage protection regime. Processes are not transparent, reasoned decisions are not required, and bureaucrats and mineral companies are able to safely ignore Indigenous people's and the whole world's scientific, spiritual, and cultural heritage. Typically, statutes for protection of European settlers' cultural heritage are more effective than those for protection of Indigenous cultural heritage. It has suited the mineral companies and governments to portray the Burrup as an issue concerning only Indigenous people, who are in no position on their own to effectively defend their heritage.

The campaign to protect the Burrup can be won, in 2007, and supporters are urged to get involved.

Details of FARA's campaign can be found on our two websites:

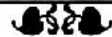
*Standupfortheburrup.org* and *friendsofaustralianrockart.org*  
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