

Campaign goes global



Burrup's history

The Burrup Peninsula is actually an island which was called a peninsula when a bridge was constructed in the 1960s joining the mainland with Dampier Island, the main site for the huge infrastructure required to handle the then emerging resources economy.

The island is one of a group of 42, the tips of an ancient mountain range which would have been 80 kilometres from the coastline during the last ice age which ended 6000 years ago, 14,000 years after the first Aboriginal engravings were put there.

The petroglyphs also include carvings of the thylacine (Tasmanian Tiger) which has been extinct on the mainland for thousands of years. There are no accurate estimates on the number of petroglyphs (ancient rock carvings) contained on the islands, but estimates range from 500,000 to 1 million.

The National Trust claims that about 10,000 petroglyphs have been destroyed in the last 44 years.

The traditional owners of the area were wiped out in the so-called Flying Foam massacre in the 1860s.

Pilbara peninsula campaign to head overseas

Story and photos by Perth Correspondent KEN BOASE



An international community campaign has begun to apply more pressure against further development and disturbance of ancient rock art on the Burrup Peninsula in the Pilbara region of Western

Australia.

Demonstrations are planned for Germany, France and Brazil.

The development of the on-shore gas processing plant by Woodside Energy has also caused a split in the five traditional owner groups on the Burrup, with some saying they would rather work with Woodside than see any more outright destruction of rock art.

The newly-formed Perth-based non-Indigenous group, Friends of Australian Rock Art (FARA), has already staged three demonstrations in Perth and is taking its campaign to other states and around the globe to raise awareness of the continued disturbance of ancient petroglyphs

on the Burrup.

FARA spokeswoman Jennifer Laker, echoing the sentiments of the Western Ngalmu group, said that the main message for Woodside and other companies was that alternatives should be found for development to prevent any further destruction of the ancient rock art.

"They've already destroyed sections of the Burrup and instead of looking for alternative sites, they're choosing to move in and destroy sections that are untouched," Ms Laker said.

"We're trying to make this a world issue and not just a West Australian issue.

"We've tried to get the WA Government interested and they're not, so now we have to make the people of the world aware that this is a World Heritage place."

Ms Laker said the Stand up for the Burrup protests in Perth should be repeated in other parts of WA and Australia 'to actually highlight this in other cities in the world so they'll understand how important this is'.

"The first overseas protest will be in front of the Eiffel Tower because that's a cultural

icon but the rock art is up to 40,000 years old, which is older than anything found in Europe, even older than the Lascaux Caves in France," she said.

Animal paintings in the Lascaux Caves are thought to be about 30,000 years old.

"We're basically saying that we've got something of even more significance and we're destroying it, that's how much we care about our culture and heritage," Ms Laker said.

There are plans for similar protests in

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London and Japan.

However, a group of Pilbara Elders, claiming to represent the Yaburarra, Mardudhunera, Ngalmu and Injibandi peoples, have issued a media release saying they would rather work with Woodside than walk away and allow the total destruction of any more rock art.

"As has been clearly stated in the

reports of the consultation with us concerning the Pluto proposal, we are against any further development on the Burrup that impacts on any of our places of cultural importance," the statement said.

"However, as a result of the agreement entered into with the State Government several years ago, and from the demonstrable fact of development going ahead in the past in spite of our objections, we are of the opinion that our cultural interests are best served by maintaining a negotiated presence in the ongoing developmental process.

"And to that end, we have entered into an agreement with Woodside that has resulted in the minimum of our sites being disturbed.

"Under that agreement, we will have access to our main sites in the larger area of the Pluto leases.

"Woodside has assured us that those areas will not be disturbed."

Perth anthropologist and heritage consultant to the four groups, Ron Parker, said development had gone unchecked on the Burrup for about 40 years and the decision to work with Woodside was the best way to protect the rock art from future development.

Ngalmu Elder Roger Barker said the

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Battle to save Burrup heads overseas

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four groups had always opposed any development of the Burrup.

"But we also know that the Burrup is a cash cow for the Government and they're not going to give that up and the only way to protect our heritage is to work alongside them and remove the rock art to a spot that suits us all," he said.

Injibandi Elder Bruce Woodley said the direct dialogue with Woodside was the best way forward for all Aboriginal groups on the Burrup.

"Some people say we're selling out our heritage, but what else can we do because companies are going to go ahead and develop anyway and so it's better this way," he said.

West Ngaluma Elder Wilfred Hicks said the issue was pitting Aboriginal people against one another and all Pilbara Aboriginal groups should stand up together and insist that the rock art be



Stand up for the Burrup protesters outside Woodside HQ in Perth, from left, Linda DuBaulay, Heidi Kiryan, Jennifer Laker, Remi Vigals and Mark Lawrence.

Ngaluma Aboriginal Corporation spokeswoman Jill Churnside said the desecration of the Burrup rock art would mean that the area would lose the spirituality contained in the region for thousands of years.

"(WA Premier) Alan Carpenter said recently that if Aboriginal people 'do not want to host an onshore processing facility, none will occur'," Ms Churnside said.

"Okay, Mr Carpenter, do it, tell Woodside that we support their project, but not having it being located on the Burrup, requiring destruction of our Dreaming Ancestors rock art and statues.

"Stonehenge in England is thousands of years younger than this art. Do we see Stonehenge being dismantled and destroyed? Why can't the project be at Onslow?

"We have to laugh at Woodside's public statements on their website that talk of broad consultation with our people about our cultural heritage.

"It just has not, and is not, happening on the Burrup.

"Maybe this wonderful Woodside

Indigenous policy is meant for blackfellas in distant lands and not here in our backyard?"

Ms Laker said FARA was aware of the friction between Pilbara Aboriginal groups over the issue.

"There is dissention between the

traditional owners and that's one of the reasons that we're trying to make this an issue for the planet rather than just Western Australia and our heritage. People keep saying it's just an Aboriginal issue, but it's everybody's heritage," she said.

West Ngaluma Elder Wilfred Hicks disagrees with some groups who have decided to work with Woodside.



preserved as it was for future generations of Aboriginal and European people.

"People are starting to have a go at each other. Aboriginal people shouldn't go at one another; it's not right," he said.

"The rock art on the Burrup is our bible and it's being torn apart."



The Woodside Puto site on the Burrup Peninsula.