

Burrup art protest hits Cott

The Sculpture by the Sea show at Cottesloe has suddenly become political.



The message was clear at the Sculpture by the Sea show.

A determined group of demonstrators staged a protest at the weekend as tens of thousands of people went to see the 50 pieces set up along Cottesloe main beach.

Protest spokesman Peter Schultz said Woodside supported contemporary art but was about to "destroy" art 30,000 years old at Burrup.

He said: "Of course we are 100% behind their support of the arts. But we are at a complete loss to understand why they can't move their proposed plant a few hundred metres, or a couple of kilometres.

"There is an area nearby on the Burrup which has been cleared long ago and art destroyed.

"To place the plant on site B, more art will be destroyed."

A Woodside spokesman said the company would decide mid-year on the huge project.

Approval had been given to move 150 pieces of rock out; non would be destroyed.

All work on the art would be done in consultation with Aboriginal people.

About 30,000 pieces of rock art were located on the Woodside site, part of more than one million on the Burrup.

Peter Schultz said: "Colin Barnett (Liberal MP for Cottesloe) went up there and after two days, he could see the good sense of leaving this fabulous art."

Mr Barnett agreed.

He said: "As Resources Minister, I admit I didn't appreciate the significance of the

rock art.

"But when I saw it I realised this is Australia's most significant heritage site. It is a measure of our civilisation that we should protect and preserve it.

"Their age ranges from 6000 to 30,000 years.

"The number is amazing – more than one million carvings.

"The range is vast – designs, animals, human figures. There is a sense of mystery about the whole area.

"There is the climbing man – a figure of a man with a cloak climbing in the rigging of a ship – and this is thousands of years ago.

"It is extraordinarily interesting. There are low stone walls – what was going on there? Were they water catchments or terrace farming?

"It is so frustrating that only 300m away there is a cleared area of government land that could be used by Woodside."

He said the federal government had "wimped it" by not getting involved.

Moving the rock art changed it, he said.

"It is embarrassing for us as a nation that we are not preserving this," he said.

"And it is ironic that it is me, a former Liberal Resources Minister who is speaking up to save the nation's art – it's a show-stopper.



Colin Barnett and his son Sam with some of the rock art he says is a national treasure.

"I have spoken on this in parliament and there has not been one speaker from the Labor side."

Mr Schultz said the demonstrators did not want to stop the \$5 billion Woodside project, but they wanted it to go ahead without destroying the unique Aboriginal art.

Mr Schultz is an art teacher who visited the Burrup Peninsula seven weeks ago.

He said Woodside had already moved 160 pieces of rock art from site A; many more would be lost if site B were developed.

Indigenous Affairs Minister Michelle Roberts gave approval for Woodside Energy to clear site B for its Pluto gas development, with conditions to protect rock art and

provide a comprehensive cultural management plan.

Twenty-five sites will remain untouched, including one featuring the Tasmanian tiger.

Mr Schultz said the protest group suspected the state government wanted more development on the Burrup and did not want Woodside appearing to give way on the art issue because that might deter other developers.

Mr Barnett said that, as a former Resources Minister, that could be the case.

Protesters hope the government might yet re-locate the liquid natural gas plant, or that a change of federal government would see Peter Garrett as federal Environment Minister and he could intervene.

Another demonstrator, Stephen Bennetts, said: "We had to highlight Woodside's hypocrisy in sponsoring Sculpture by the Sea art exhibition while simultaneously destroying world heritage Aboriginal rock art on the Burrup Peninsula to build an LNG plant."

Woodside supports many arts projects, including Perth International Arts Festival \$40,000; Awesome Arts Australia Ltd \$100,000; Art Gallery of WA Year 12 Perspectives exhibition, to annually show student art and design in Perth and the Pilbara \$25,000; Woodside Web Life an interactive dynamic on-line script writing initiative which encourages creative thinking and writing among children across regional WA \$25,000.