

# Talks ban for chief watchdog

Janine MacDonald

THE head of Western Australia's environmental watchdog must stand aside from all discussions involving oil and gas giant Woodside because of his recent consulting work for the group.

The call from the Conservation Council of Western Australia came as the state Government defended the appointment, saying Barry Carbon had experience across the country in both industry and the conservation movement.

Conservation Council director Chris Tallentire said "it would be incredibly serious" if Mr Carbon, who will fill in as Environmental Protection Authority chairman for the next three months, did not step aside from decisions about Woodside.

A spokeswoman for Environment Minister David Templeman said late yesterday that Mr Carbon would "excuse himself where there was a conflict of interest".

Mr Carbon, a former chairman of the EPA, is the second interim chairman to fill the hole left by the sudden departure of Wally Cox in February as Western Australia's depleted public service struggles to meet the demands of the booming state.

He recently acted on behalf of Woodside in discussions with the federal Government to ex-

cise the \$12 billion Pluto LNG project area from the 241sq km of the Dampier Archipelago that was placed on the National Heritage List because of its 30,000-year-old rock art.

A spokeswoman for the minister said the Carpenter Government was grateful Mr Carbon had agreed to act as interim chairman.

The spokeswoman said the final advice on Woodside's Pluto project would come from the Independent Appeals Convener, not the EPA, which had already made its determination on the project. The decision would rest with the minister.

Mr Carbon, who was approached by the Government days before his contract with Woodside expired, has refused to say how he would handle issues involving Woodside.



**Controversy:** How *The Australian* broke the story yesterday