

Pluto mine closer to green light

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Exploration

WOODSIDE'S \$12 billion Pluto LNG investment is set to proceed after the WA Government rejected appeals against an Environment Protection Authority recommendation.

The decision by state Environment Minister David Templeman yesterday said the Pluto project could proceed if Woodside submitted a "significantly improved" offset package covering coral disturbance and committed to several tough environmental conditions.

In arriving at the decision, Mr Templeman rejected nine appeals, most of which raised concerns about the impact of the onshore Pluto processing plant on

30,000-year-old Aboriginal rock art, described by some campaigners as Australia's equivalent to Stonehenge.

Woodside has said it will have to move 300 petroglyphs to provide a pad for its plant, which is next door to the North West Shelf gas project.

It is estimated there are more than 1 million individual examples of rock art in the area surrounding the NW Shelf LNG processing plants and the iron ore loading facilities at Dampier.

"The Aboriginal rock art of the Burrup Peninsula and Dampier archipelago is immensely valuable in cultural and heritage terms and the Carpenter Government supports a range of measures to protect it, including listing of the

area on the national heritage register," Mr Templeman said.

"But I am satisfied that the protection and conservation of rock art will not be compromised by this project."

Mr Templeman's decision was released on the eve of Woodside signing a multi-billion-dollar sales contract for Pluto LNG with a Japanese buyer today in Sydney.

Before committing to Australia's biggest single corporate investment, Woodside had signed two heads of agreement, with Tokyo Gas and Kansai Electric, for a combined total of 3.25 to 3.75 million tonnes a year of LNG for 15 years, with an option in place to extend the supply contract for a further five years.