

RPT-Australia rock art vandals spark LNG plant row

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Woodside's Pluto and Xena fields have reserves of 4.5 trillion cubic feet, and the project is expected to produce around 5 million tonnes of LNG a year.

But the project has provoked outrage from indigenous rights activists and environment groups because the company plans to move 150 ancient rock engravings to make way for the development, due to be operational by 2010.

Vandals had used a metal implement to deface carvings of kangaroos and fish, which fall outside a government heritage order protecting 99 percent of Aboriginal rock art in north-western Australia, Chapple said.

The state government estimates that the Burrup Peninsula has more than 10,000 engravings on over 500 sites.

Chapple called on Turnbull, who is at risk of losing his Sydney-based seat in an imminent national election, to encourage Woodside to move the controversial LNG plant site.

To increase pressure on the minister, advertisements for The Friends of Australian Rock Art were placed on Wednesday in Turnbull's local newspaper, urging voters to demand an inquiry into the heritage values of the WA rock art.

"Calling on the minister to review the state's decision is a very valid attempt to ensure that the values of the Burrup are retained," Chapple said.

Turnbull is also facing criticism over his oversight of a timber pulp mill project planned for the green-leaning and electorally volatile south-east island state of Tasmania.

Woodside spokesman Roger Martin said the company was working with Aboriginal people on the preservation of the rock art to ensure the LNG plant could go ahead as planned.

"We are not destroying rock art, we are not blowing up rock art, we are not sticking rock art behind wire," he said.