

Govt gives go-ahead to Pluto gas project

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Woodside's Pluto development will be Australia's largest resource project. (Woodside)

The Federal Government has approved Woodside's \$12 billion Pluto gas development, the second huge gas project to get the go-ahead this week.

Woodside's project has been approved despite fears of the environmental impacts and the potential destruction of ancient rock art.

The federal Environment Minister has imposed strict conditions to protect the threatened species and ecological communities.

And Woodside has already given an undertaking that it will minimise damage to the rock art when it builds its processing plant.

It says only up to 200 pieces of rock art will be affected.

The Pluto announcement follows the final government approval for the massive Gorgon gas project earlier in the week. But the partners in Gorgon are yet to make a final investment decision.

Woodside has already committing funds to its project, which involves pumping gas from the Pluto and Xena fields off the Pilbara.

Woodside's chief executive Don Voelte has commended the governments on the deal.

"Both the State and the Commonwealth have done a really admirable job, number one protecting the citizens and the needs for environmental sensitivities, and basically balancing the risk and benefits of a project like this," he said.

"So people have to look at Australia and say this is not a bad to invest."

The company expects to start work at the Burrup Peninsula on Monday morning. Woodside says between 100 and 200 items of rock art would need to be moved.

'Immense disappointment'

The Federal Government's decision has disappointed the Friends of Australian Rock Art's group convenor, Robin Chapple.

"[There is] immense personal and collective disappointment on behalf of the international community really," he said.

"Here we have one of the world's pre-eminent sites recognised as being the largest, one of the earliest of our pre-history, being thrown out with the bath water, just for political expediency at the time of forthcoming federal election."

Mr Chapple doesn't blame Woodside, which he says has been doing its best in the circumstances to protect rock art. He says the WA Government should not have allowed and encouraged industry to be developed there in the first place.

"Certainly the State Government is indicating that Mr Turnbull's heritage listing of the area does not impede them in their design to make just one of the largest industrial complexes in the Asia Pacific region," he said.

WA Greens Senator Rachel Siewert says environmentalists are also critical of the outcome, despite the Federal Government laying down strict conditions.

"This week another proposed development for this area has been approved, and that's the Gorgon proposal, which has also been identified as having an impact on the marine environment," she said.

"There's a number of other developments up the coast of Western Australia, and we don't believe it's these issues that are being adequately taken into consideration."