

Pluto approved over Aboriginal concerns

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THE federal Government has rejected Aboriginal heritage concerns and approved the \$12 billion Pluto LNG project.

Work will begin on Monday on identifying and clearing Aboriginal rock art on the Burrup Peninsula and on constructing huge LNG storage tanks.

Resources Minister Ian Macfarlane and Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull said late yesterday that approval had been granted under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 for Pluto to proceed on strict environmental conditions.

“The decision to grant environmental approval for the Pluto project will ensure that industry development can proceed with environmental conditions to protect threatened and migratory species, ecological communities and the Commonwealth marine environment,” Mr Turnbull said.

Woodside told the stock exchange that Commonwealth environmental approval was the last of the key state and federal environmental and heritage hurdles required for the project to proceed.

“This approval allows for construction of the Pluto LNG Project to be commenced,” its statement said.

“Other regulatory approvals continue to be received in line with expectations.”

Pluto involves construction of a one-train 4.2 million tonne a year capacity LNG processing facility on the Burrup Peninsula

supplied by gas transported on-shore through a pipeline from the Pluto gas field, around 186km northwest of Karratha in Western Australia.

It is the largest investment made by an Australian company and is scheduled to ship its first cargoes to Japan late in 2010.

The environmental conditions attached to the decision include requirements for management plans to mitigate any impacts on threatened species, notably the Olive Python, sea turtles and other marine mammals.

Woodside will also be required to establish management plans to protect the commonwealth marine environment, including a dredging and spoil disposal management plan, an oil spill contingency plan as well as offshore drilling operations, construction, installation and operations management plans.

The ministers said the Pluto development would inject \$17.6 billion into the national economy, including up to 3000 direct jobs during construction and a further 200 direct jobs and 3000 indirect jobs during operation.

Woodside chief executive Don Voelte said that as a result of the approvals work would begin on the Burrup site within 48 hours.

The decision, foreshadowed in The Australian today, was important in ensuring Australia benefited from the impending global shortfall in LNG supply capacity, particularly into Asia.

Mr Voelte was confident that even though there “might be a few bumps on the way” the project, which will transform

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Woodside into a major global LNG player would be built on time. Pluto project director Lucio Della Martina said that initial work from next week would identify Aboriginal rock art on Site B on the Burrup and start constructing tanks on Site A, where rock art examples have been identified and secured.

Mr Della Martina said the project was the only LNG project to be approved anywhere in the world in the past two years, which reflected in part the speed with which the West Australian Government had dealt with necessary approvals since the Pluto gas field was found in April



2005. Mr Turnbull has been subjected to a lobbying campaign in his Sydney electorate by Friends of Rock Art, which says the Pluto plant should be relocated because of the cultural significance of the 30,000 year-old petroglyphs.

Friends convenor Robin Chapple said last night the

campaign would continue though the group was seeking more advice before committing to a High Court challenge.

Australian Greens senator Rachel Siewert said: "First with the Gunns pulp mill, then Barrow Island, now they seem determined to steamroll over the Burrup Peninsula."