



Federal Govt under fire over Burrup rock art protection

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The Greens' candidate for the Western Australian seat of Kalgoorlie, Robin Chapple, has criticised a decision by the Federal Government to refuse emergency protection of rock art on the Burrup Peninsula.

Mr Chapple, who also chairs the group Friends of Australian Rock Art, says the decision was delivered after the election was called when the Government was supposed to be in caretaker mode.

The decision was contained in a letter faxed yesterday by the office of Assistant Minister for the Environment, John Cobb, to lawyers for rock art custodians, the Wong-Goo-tt-oo people.

The Wong-Goo-tt-oo had applied for the area, in WA's north-west, to be protected under the Aboriginal Heritage Protection Act.

Mr Chapple says the decision comes less than a week after the Government gave environmental approval for the Pluto gas plant to be built in the area.

"For Mr Cobb to come out with this statement almost seems like an absolute panic mode in the 11th hour of a dying Government," he said.

"Then [for it to be] released under a caretaker mode smacks of impropriety at the highest level."

A spokesman for the Minister says Mr Cobb was not satisfied that the area was of particular significance to Aboriginal people in accordance with Aboriginal tradition.

He says caretaker mode starts today at noon and the decision was taken last week before the election was announced.