

# World fund raises hell over Pluto

**Robert Bevan**

The World Monuments Fund has accused Australia of being “greedy” in allowing Woodside Energy’s proposed \$11 billion Pluto gas processing plant on Western Australia’s Burrup Peninsula to go ahead.

The Burrup, dubbed Australia’s Stonehenge, holds the world’s largest collection of rock art: almost 1 million carvings as much as 30,000 years old, including what could be the first-ever human faces depicted.

“It is the oldest and largest body of rock art in the world and we can’t afford to lose it,” the chief executive of the fund’s British affiliate, Jonathan Foyle, said. “This site is so important that it’s an absolute last resort to destroy any part of it.” Noting the drive to feed the Chinese market for natural resources he said: “Australia is not on its knees in grinding poverty and needing a way out. It is being rather greedy.”

Dr Foyle is visiting Australia to

raise awareness of the issue. The fund has included Burrup, part of the Dampier Archipelago, on its list of the top 100 endangered heritage places worldwide.

In July, Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull added 99 per cent of the area to the National Heritage List, excluding the crucial 1 per cent that Woodside wishes to develop.

Mr Turnbull’s office refused to comment but a spokeswoman said that of the 1 million engravings only 0.05 per cent were on the Pluto site and that “Woodside is investing in excess of \$40 million protecting this unique heritage place”.

Woodside declined to comment. “We’ve received approvals for the area,” company spokeswoman Kirsten Stoney said.

Dr Foyle said the unprotected area amounted to 2.4 square kilometres and that the petroglyph precinct was substantially older than Egypt’s pyramids. “If people start moving rocks, it starts an appalling precedent.”

The fund wants the federal government to ban the development. Some areas of rock art have already been bulldozed, and 200 carved boulders were removed by Woodside with the approval of the state government.

The North-West Shelf joint venture, Australia’s largest resource development project, which includes BHP Billiton, BP and Chevron, last year rejected a proposal that Woodside share an existing facility on the peninsula rather than building a new plant.

## KEY POINTS

- The WMF has put Burrup, where Woodside Energy will build a gas processing plant, on its list of the top 100 endangered heritage sites.
- It says it is the oldest and largest body of rock art in the world and wants the development banned.