

THE MURUJUGA DECLARATION

Statement by Robynne Churnside, traditional owner of Murujuga (the Burrup Peninsula) read at the protest against the Pluto project by Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi custodians at Woodside's Pluto LNG lease, 17 November 2007.¹

Woodside says they have not destroyed any rock art on the Burrup Peninsula, just 'moved' it. My people say that once a piece of rock art left by our ancestors is removed, our song line, our sacred site, is destroyed forever. Aboriginal people believe that the Burrup is a powerful and dangerous place, and that bad things will happen to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people if it is disturbed.

For nearly forty years, Woodside and other companies have made billions of dollars from our country. But what benefits have we, the Aboriginal custodians of the Burrup, seen from the mining boom? While white mining executives live in luxury in Peppermint Grove in Perth, today, in 2007, there are still 15 Aboriginal families in Roebourne living in houses made of asbestos!

Our people said we were happy for Woodside to build the gas plant on our country, as long as they didn't damage our rock art, our sacred sites, our library for future generations. We asked them to put the plant nearby, somewhere where our cultural heritage, our stories would be safe. That's what we said to Woodside, the Western Australian Government and the Federal Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, but instead, they were too greedy, and didn't listen to us.

When our old people signed the BMIEA Agreement with the State government in 2003, we thought they would be true to their word. Woodside and the Western Australian Government promised to protect our cultural heritage, but instead they told us a lot of lies.

Woodside has not even followed the section 18 conditions set down by State Minister, Michelle Roberts, legalizing Woodside's destruction of our rock art.

The WA Aboriginal Heritage Act gives mining companies permission to legally destroy Aboriginal heritage in Western Australia under whitefella law, but doesn't even follow whitefellas' own law. It gives a right of appeal to white developers who ask the Minister for permission to destroy our heritage, but not to the Traditional Owners who own that heritage. So it goes against whitefellas' own law, the Racial Discrimination Act 1975.

WA Environment Minister David Templeman's EPA approval for Woodside's Pluto project was also probably invalid.

Woodside paid archaeologists and anthropologists to come here and destroy our rock art on Pluto A and B leases. None of them got permission from our old people to do this. By

¹ For a news report on the protest, see 'Protest at Pluto ruffles feathers' *Pilbara News*, 21 November 2007. Available at: <http://www.dampierrockart.net/Media/index.html>

doing this, they breached their own professional codes of ethics, as well as the Burra Charter and the UNESCO Statement on the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage.

When my *goombarli* [brother-in-law] Wilfred Hicks asked Federal Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull to protect our cultural heritage on Pluto B and move the Pluto plant somewhere else less dangerous, he waited until three days after his own Government was dissolved in October, and then told his offsider, Mr John Cobb, to send a fax to my *goombarli* telling his decision. John Cobb told Wilfred that in his opinion, ‘the Pluto B area does not meet the criteria under the Act for an Aboriginal protected area’.

Woodside and the WA Government think they have the right to do whatever they like with our country here, which they call ‘Pluto B’, an area that is part of what we call ‘Murujuga’.

We say Murujuga is still our country, through our ancestors and our dreaming. We say it is still our right under Aboriginal Law to come here, to hunt, collect bush tucker and bush medicine, light fires, conduct ceremonies and make decisions about this country.

We have come here today to show people around the world that whatever Woodside, the State and Federal Governments say, we *still* have the right to enter our land, to exercise our native title rights here and to defend and protect it from the greed and destruction brought upon it by the Western Australian Government and Woodside.

Robyne Churnside is a member of the Ngarluma native title group, Pilbara Native Title Service Executive Committee, Equal Opportunity Commission Discrimination Committee and convenor of the Roebourne Strong Women’s Group.