

Premier basks in Pluto's approval

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Construction of Woodside Petroleum's \$11.2 billion Pluto venture may have started almost a year ago, but yesterday it was the turn of the massive gas project's stakeholders to bask in the Pilbara sun of what they described as a "world-class achievement".

On site on the Burrup Peninsula, Woodside chief executive Don Voelte and WA Premier Alan Carpenter both lauded the speed with which company and Government had skipped through a torturous approvals process.

With first liquefied natural gas due by late 2010, Pluto remains on track to become the fastest-developed LNG project in the world based on the time taken from first gas discovery in 2005 to completion. Site works, which began in January, are well advanced.

Gone is the controversy generated by Woodside's need to move ancient rock art from its Burrup site.

Mr Voelte, who described the rock

art as top of his list of "most important things", said Woodside treated as a priority its role as rock "custodians". Ngarlama elder Trevor Solomon, who attended yesterday's ceremony to

commemorate the start of construction, concurred, while senior executives from Pluto's foundation gas customers, Kansai Electric and Tokyo Gas, rejoiced at the progress being made.

Mr Carpenter said Pluto demonstrated his Government's ability to fast-track big-ticket resources projects without getting bogged down in red tape — a regular criticism from corporate WA.

"This is unparalleled in the world that we've got a project to where it is in such a short period of time," Mr Carpenter said.

Mr Voelte, who described LNG as "the future", said Pluto's approval gave him confidence for Woodside's Browse development, which could be even bigger than Pluto.

"Let us just say the Pluto approvals process wasn't easy, it was hard work by everybody but it was hard work that was justified by getting a great product at the end of the day," he said. "We went to work with the Government and we have learnt things along the way. It was hard but it was the right kind of 'hard' to do and we are happy to go through that again (with Browse)."

The reporter travelled to the Burrup with Woodside Petroleum.



Positive: Alan Carpenter looks over relocated rock art on the Burrup peninsula at the launch of the Pluto project with Woodside chief Don Voelte. Picture: Sharon Smith