

Indigenous group in legal fight on Burrup

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As another giant gas eyed off the Burrup Peninsula yesterday, a Pilbara Aboriginal community pleaded with the Federal Government to protect the region's precious rock art from further disruption.

US energy giant Chevron announced it was considering "a handful" of possible locations on the Pilbara coastline for its proposed Wheatstone liquefied natural gas project, which analysts believe could cost between \$10 billion and \$15 billion.

The Wheatstone gas field, 145km north-west of Karratha, is close to Woodside's Pluto gas field.

However, Chevron faces an uphill battle to get the necessary approvals to base its onshore gas processing facilities on the Burrup, where Woodside's Pluto plant is located, because of a desperate rearguard action by Aborigines.

As reported by *The West Australian* columnist Paul Murray on Saturday, the Ngarluma Aboriginal Corpora-

tion has legal advice that suggests the State Government could be in breach of its obligations under the controversial Burrup and Maitland Industrial Estate agreement.

It believes the State Aboriginal Heritage Act could be invalid and companies operating on the Burrup under certificates issued by State ministers are already doing so illegally and without authority.

Yesterday, corporation chairwoman Jill Churnside wrote to Federal Heritage Minister Peter Garrett urging him to meet "on our country so that you can hear from us first hand as to what we permit or do not permit on the archipelago".

Ms Churnside says the group has seen the State Government's draft Management Arrangement for the Dampier Archipelago and is not impressed. "The basic purpose of the

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document is clearly to legitimise the continuing practice of rock art removal in a National Heritage-listed area and the Burrup at the whim of industry," Ms Churnside told Mr Garrett.

The WA Government wants to negotiate a bilateral agreement with the Federal Government for the return of heritage responsibilities to the State after what Treasurer Eric Ripper says was a handshake deal with former Federal Heritage Minister Malcolm Turnbull last year.

But Ms Churnside has pleaded with Mr Garrett to resist the State's overtures.

"We oppose the making of a bilateral agreement and any other arrangements that allow the Federal Government to back away from the shameful vandalism of our country," she said.

"The WA Government, of whatever party, is always pro-developer and anti-indigenous. We need you and your new Government to get that wrong balance right."