

Concerns over second plant

By BEV STORY

PLANS for a second ammonium nitrate plant on the Burrup Peninsula could result in further damage to ancient rock art on the peninsula – from elevated emissions and from increased incidence of vandalism.

Friends of Australian Rock Art spokesman Robin Chapple said ammonium, nitrate and sulphur dioxide levels were already elevated in the vicinity of the existing plant, owned by Burrup Holdings.

“The current emissions in our view are a problem,” Mr Chapple said.

“We know we have elevated emissions.”

Plans to build a new \$600 million ammonium nitrate plant on the Burrup Peninsula were announced last week by Burrup Holdings.

It will establish the new business venture with Yara International and Burrup Nitrates Joint Venture – subject to final engineering studies, statutory and finance approvals.

Production is scheduled to start during the fiscal year of 2011.

The new plant will be built adjacent to the Burrup Holdings owned Burrup Fertilisers ammonia facility, which was

commissioned in 2006. This will enable the new venture to benefit from competitive feedstock prices and the use of existing infrastructure on the Burrup Peninsula. Mr Chapple said while it was unclear whether the plant’s emissions would damage the rock art, the group was concerned that it would.

“The rock art in most cases is visual, because of a coloration between the surface rock and the substrata, which is the underlying rock,” he said.

“If any impact on the surface between colorations affects the surface coloration – we will lose the visual affect.”

Mr Chapple said there had already been numerous international protests – including on the Great Wall of China and in Singapore – against a second plant being built on the Burrup, since it was first mooted a year ago.

“The international community is in absolute uproar,” he said.

“Because it is remote – in the back blocks of WA the attitude is ‘as long as we bury our heads in the sand we can forget about it’.”

Mr Chapple was also concerned that an increased workforce in the area would lead to elevated vandalism of the rock art, despite huge fines if anyone

was caught.

Fines up to \$5.5 million plus up to seven years’ imprisonment can be imposed.

“I am just amazed frankly that we have reached this stage,” he said of the announcement that a second plant would be built.

While much of the peninsula was within the area given National Heritage listing in late 2007 – the area of the proposed plant fell between listed areas – but that wouldn’t stop emissions harming the art.

“It is identified globally as the most significant chronology of human evolution,” Mr Chapple said.

“It is not just a bunch of rock art – it is the only place in the world that we can track evolution.”

Significantly among the eras covered is the period 17,000 years ago when Australia went through its longest known drought – 500 years.

“We have now got the issues out there because of vandalism,” he said.

As recently reported in the Pilbara News, vandalism of the rock art continued to increase and the Friends of Australian Rock Art group has called on both Federal and WA Governments to only allow controlled access to the heritage sites, in order to protect them.



Friends of Australian Rock Art spokesman Robin Chapple said ammonium, nitrate and sulphur dioxide levels are already elevated in the vicinity of the existing Burrup Holdings ammonium nitrate plant and the group is concerned about damage to ancient rock art. The group is against a second plant being built.