

## Aboriginals take tough stance against moving rock art

**BEATRICE THOMAS**

A North-West indigenous group has taken its strongest stance yet to stop the destruction of rock carvings on the Burrup Peninsula by resolving to reject any further requests from resource companies to move rock art.

Wong-Goo-Tt-Oo elder Wilfred Hicks said yesterday the group had decided at an annual general meeting last month to "draw a line in the sand" and oppose the further removal of any ancient rock for industrial development.

He said his people had had enough of the State and Federal governments' soft stance on the issue. "The government is not listening. Whatever they want to do

they're just going right ahead and doing," he said.

Mr Hicks estimated that since the Dampier Port Authority requested to move a few rock carvings five or six years ago the total number of requests from developers and governments had grown to more than 1000. The last request from Woodside to move more than 200 for its Pluto Area B gas development was the final straw, he said.

The Wong-Goo-Tt-Oo people's stance comes after the World Archaeology Congress demanded this month that the State and Federal

governments do more to protect the Burrup rock carvings from being damaged or destroyed by industrial development.

Former Greens MLC for the region and Friends of Australian Rock Art spokesman Robin Chapple said the Wong-Goo-Tt-Oo group's decision would not stop governments from approving projects but major corporations who valued their international reputation would take it on board. He said not agreeing to any rock art being moved meant the group was also forgoing any financial settlement opportunities, which was "a massive statement in its own right".

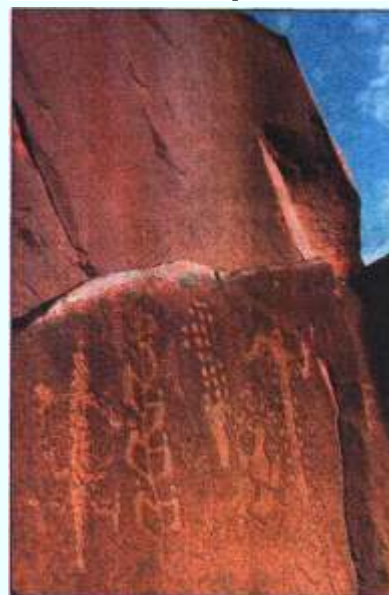
Mr Hicks said neighbouring Aboriginal groups might still approve removal of rock art on the Burrup. But Mr Chapple believed the Wong-Goo-Tt-Oo group's views were becoming more widely held.

A spokesperson for State Development Minister Eric Ripper said the inclusion of the Dampier Archipelago and Burrup Peninsula on the National Heritage List last year offered additional protection under Commonwealth law, strengthening protections afforded by the landmark Burrup and Maitland Industrial Estates Agreement signed in 2003.

Woodside said last week that only

5 per cent of rock art had been moved for its Pluto gas project, but it would not rule out bids to relocate more art in the future.

The Federal Government has maintained it was working with the State Government to create a bilateral agreement to ensure the rock art was adequately protected while allowing development.



**Ancient: The Climbing Man rock art on the Burrup Peninsula.**