

Resource lobbyist for green watchdog

Janine MacDonald

A FORMER lobbyist for oil and gas giant Woodside has been appointed to head Western Australia's environmental watchdog just weeks after representing the company in the international controversy over 30,000-year-old rock art in the Pilbara region.

Barry Carbon, a former head of the Environmental Protection Authority, has been called back for a three-month assignment as the state Government searches for a new permanent head.

Mr Carbon has a private practice advising on environmental issues, which included representing Woodside in negotiations to excise the site of the \$12 billion Pluto LNG project from the National Heritage listing of 24sq km of the Dampier Archipelago, including the Burrup peninsula.

The listing announced by federal Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull on July 3 followed a major campaign to block industrial development on the Burrup to preserve an estimated one million items of Aboriginal rock art, known as petroglyphs, which some experts claim are Australia's equivalent of Stonehenge.

As EPA chairman from today, Mr Carbon will make recommendations about resources projects, possibly including the final environmental approval for Pluto, the project Woodside announced last Friday would pro-

ceed, conditional on achieving environmental approvals covering its undersea gas pipeline.

The Burrup LNG Park, fuelled by Pluto gas, is on land that Woodside and Mr Carbon, as its key negotiator, successfully argued should be excised from the national heritage listing.

His temporary appointment has forced him to take his name off the state Government's lobbyists' register, set up after the fiasco over the activities of lobbyist and former Labor premier Brian Burke, which claimed several ministerial scalps.

Mr Carbon told *The Australian* he was approached by the



Carbon

Government to fill in at the post he held from the mid-80s to early-90s, just two days after the heritage listing was announced.

The Opposition has called for Mr Carbon to stand aside from making decisions or recommendations on any matter involving Woodside, not just on the Burrup.

Opposition environment spokesman Steve Thomas said he was not concerned about a short-term appointment, but any extension of time could create problems.

"This needs to be seen to be

above board," he said. "He needs to be recognised as having links (to Woodside). He has to step aside from any decisions that relate to any company for which he has lobbied," Dr Thomas said.

Mr Carbon has solid green credentials. He was appointed by the then Burke Labor government to chair the EPA from 1985-1993 and was Alcoa Australia's environmental manager in the 1980s when it won a UN environmental award. He has also been head of the Queensland, federal and New Zealand environmental protection agencies.

The EPA has been without a long-term chairman since the surprise departure of Wally Cox in February.

It is one of three state government agencies without a permanent head, the others being the Department of Industry and Resources and the Department of Planning and Infrastructure.

Mr Carbon, whose term runs from August 1 to November 4, said he gave the state Government a declaration of his interests and took his name off the lobbyists' register as soon as he accepted the job.

"I regard myself as a person who works at a pretty high level across industry," he said.