

Aboriginal group seeks Commonwealth intervention on Pluto

Steve Rotherham
Monday, 10 September 2007

THE Wong-Goo-Tt-Oo native title group has lodged applications seeking a Ministerial Declaration that would effectively prevent Woodside Petroleum from siting the Pluto LNG Plant at the 'Area B' on the Burrup Peninsula. But Woodside is unfazed.

Aboriginal elder and spokesman Wilfred Hicks said the application was lodged under the Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act because Woodside and the Western Australian Government had left the group no alternative.



"The intrusion of Woodside's planned development on Area B on the Burrup must rank as one of the worst incidents of the destruction of Aboriginal heritage and world class rock art in Australia," Hicks said.

"The destruction of our country is now out of control, with Woodside preparing, with the active assistance of the State Government, for the wholesale destruction of hundreds of ancient engravings that link us spiritually with our ancestors, by developing the Pluto Project on Area B. Engravings not destroyed will be closed off to us behind barricades and fences."

Woodside spokesperson Hannah Fitzhardinge confirmed the company had received applications under sections 9 and 10 of the Act.

"We will consider the applications and respond accordingly," she said.

"The lodgement of such an application was expected and we do not believe it will have any impact on our schedule for Pluto."

Hicks said Woodside originally asked the group to approve the LNG plant on the site of the former Hearson Village known as areas E&D.

"We agreed to that, but now they want to build the plant on Area B, which was previously undisturbed, and destroy engravings that are significant to our songs and ceremonies," he said.

Hicks said the Wong-Goo-Tt-Oo had hoped their heritage would be protected under the WA Aboriginal Heritage Act, but in February 2007 Minister Michelle Roberts overruled the independent Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee which had recommended against granting permission for development of Area B.

Woodside said it has not, and does not intend to, destroy any rock art.

"There are approximately 3000 rock art engravings within the Pluto lease area, of which 100 to 200 will be relocated," Fitzhardinge said.

"Ninety-five percent of the rock art on the Pluto lease will be left undisturbed. To

put this in a regional context, there are approximately 1 million rock art engravings in the Dampier Rock Art Precinct, so this amounts to a fraction of 1 percent of the engravings within the precinct.

"Forty-two of the 100 to 200 engravings are on Site A and have already been successfully relocated to an area within the Pluto lease identified with the help of the traditional custodians. A similar process will be followed on Site B."