

Vandals use power tools to deface Burrup art

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Federal authorities have warned that anyone caught vandalising priceless rock art on the Burrup Peninsula could be hit with fines of up to \$5.5 million and jail terms of seven years amid fears pieces in the remote region have been attacked with chisels and power tools.

And conservation groups say State and Federal governments should better control public access to the art or cut it off altogether.

Robin Chapple, of conservation group the Minerals Policy Institute, said a significant art carving in the centre of the Burrup had been defaced in recent weeks, possibly by somebody using an electric drill.

He thought it had probably been vandalised by a local, as the area was impossible to reach without a four-wheel-drive.

Mr Chapple said the vast area in the Pilbara was rarely patrolled by rangers and the Federal and State governments needed to step up efforts to safeguard the thousands of carvings in the area, some of which are thought to be about 6000 years old. He said if authorities could not control public access to the area they should prevent people from going there completely.

A spokeswoman for Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull said tough penalties would apply to anybody convicted of defacing a federally protected site, including millions in fines and imprisonment.

“Under the Act, no one can take any action that has, will have, or is likely to have, a significant impact on national heritage place without approval . . . substantial penalties apply for actions without approval,” she said.

Mr Turnbull this year granted Federal heritage listing to large swaths of the Burrup, but excluded a small area where oil and gas company Woodside has begun building its Pluto refinery.

Pressure group the Friends of Australian Rock Art group recently ran newspaper advertisements in Mr Turnbull’s Sydney electorate complaining he had not done enough to safeguard the carvings at the Pluto site.



Defaced: A mark made by vandals next to Aboriginal carvings at a site on the Burrup Peninsula in the Pilbara.