

Pluto gas project gets final go-ahead

CHRIS JOHNSON
CANBERRA

Construction of Woodside's \$12 billion gas venture on the Burrup Peninsula will start immediately after the Federal Government yesterday approved the project, despite fears the development will put at risk ancient Aboriginal rock art.

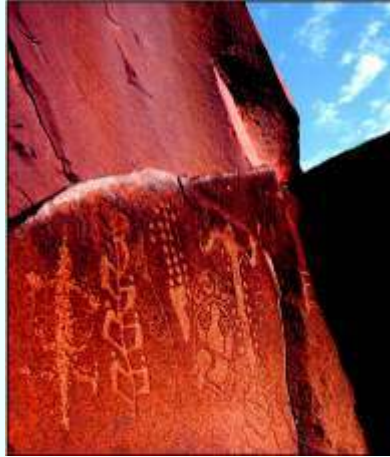
Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull ticked off the project with strict conditions. His decision came two days after he sanctioned Chevron's \$20 billion gas project on Barrow Island.

Woodside said the decision cleared the way for construction of the LNG processing facility on the Burrup and a pipeline from the Pluto gas field, about 190km north-west of Karratha.

"We have been ready just waiting for this final clearance," Woodside spokesman Roger Martin said. "We have now obtained all the necessary heritage approvals at both State and Federal levels."

Work would start within 48 hours.

The Greens accused the Government of facilitating the destruction of



Under threat: Burrup rock art.

the rock art when it could have ensured the project went ahead nearby without threatening the art.

"This is the third major environmental decision by the Howard Government in the past few days, first with the Gunns pulp mill in Tasmania, then Barrow Island," Greens Senator Rachel Siewert said. "Now they seem determined to steamroll over the Burrup Peninsula. This

Government would bulldoze the Great Pyramid if it stood in the way of economic development."

Mr Turnbull said environment and heritage protection could be balanced with economic and industry development. "The decision to grant environment approval for the Pluto project will ensure that industry development can proceed with environmental conditions to protect threatened and migratory species, ecological communities and the marine environment," he said.

The environmental conditions include requirements for management plans to mitigate impact on threatened species, such as the olive python and sea turtle. Woodside will have to come up with a dredging and spoil disposal management plan, as well as an oil spill plan. Offshore drilling, construction, installation and operations management plans will also have to be submitted.

A bid by the Wong-Goo-Tt-Oo people to have the area declared of Aboriginal heritage significance is expected to be rejected. A decision will be announced next week.