

17/06/2022

Premier Jeremy Rockcliff  
Level 10, 15 Murray Street,  
HOBART TAS 7000

Dear Premier Rockcliff,

I want to tell you my story, it is important that you understand the hurt, frustration and the pain the many Aboriginal families within the Community are suffering over the decisions your Minister, the honourable, Mr Jaensch has made with your Eligibility Policy. This Policy allows people who self-identify to have access to the Government's Aboriginal Services and Programs. But to extend your Policy to accessing Country is unconscionable conduct. The Government and stakeholders require deeper consultation and consideration on this matter. There is a big difference between eligibility and being an Aboriginal person, which means Services and Programs Vs Country, Culture and people.

My family is from Cape Barren Island. My Great Grandmother, Judith Thomas was born on lungtalanana (Clark Island), my grandmother Clyda Beeton was born on Chappell Island. She eventually moved to Flinders Island, living at Pine Scrub, with many other Aboriginal families. There she met my grandfather Clarence Mansell. They left Flinders and moved to Cape Barren Island, settled in and had a large family. My mother, Freda Mansell was born at Prickly Bottom on Cape Barren Island.

My mother was born in the era where our people were called "half castes" or "hybrids", by local authorities and previous Governments. My mother was part of Anthropological experiment conducted by Dr Norman Tindale in 1939 where he took front and side photos, measured heads, took blood and hair samples, checked teeth and took notes for academic journals. She was given a number - **1623**. This does sound familiar to another group of people that were persecuted at the same time in Europe for who they were.

Mum lived in the time of the Aboriginal Reserve Act; our people had to get permission to marry a white person and who could visit the Island. This is all the legislation. Our people were strong and petitioned the Government for land on Cape Barren Island. Which, they never got at that time.

The government introduced the Assimilation Policy, where my family was encouraged to move off the Island and live on mainland Tasmania for better opportunities for employment, housing, education etc. This did not happen. My family struggled and lived in poverty.

Many families from the CBI and surrounding Islands moved to suburbs in Launceston, Burnie, and Hobart. Our family moved around a lot, due to lack of employment, housing, and racism. Most families also moved for seasonal work for example fruit picking.

My mum met my Father, Jack Spotswood on a Raspberry farm at Longley, just out of Hobart. His father owned the farm where many Aboriginal families would work each summer, for very low pay. It was all that families could do to survive in Tasmania.

When I was growing up we were the only Aboriginal people. By the early 70's our people were being arrested and put in jail for minor offences, we could not get housing. The education system was teaching the children that there were no Tasmanian Aboriginal people. We suffered high levels of racial discrimination from the authorities and every day white Tasmanians.

The Aboriginal community, yes, those families who come off the Islands, got together around the State saying enough is enough. A meeting was organised in Launceston at the Trade Union Hall in the early 70's, and our people travelled from Hobart and Burnie to get there. This was the beginning of the Aboriginal Information Service (AIS) now the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC). This small service supported our people to get housing, navigate social security scheme (Centrelink), legal advice to stop our people from going to jail because we were neglected by mainstream services and ignored by state governments.

I was a part of the first Land Rights march in Launceston, where people on the side of the road watching us and telling us to "go back to where you come from" and other derogatory remarks. We grew up strong and proud, we fought for the lands we have today, and we have our own people caring for our lands.

Premier Rockliff this is a snippet of my family's story, a story filled with heartache, sorrow and love. I have stories that my mother handed down to me and I have handed down to my children. She taught us what bush tucker we could eat, told us special stories about our old people and our language. You can hear that I am connected to Country, family, Community and my ancestors. I am a Tasmanian Aboriginal.

Your Eligibility Policy cannot be use for Country because it does not make sense as its purpose is for Tasmanian Government Aboriginal Services and Programs only.

For two hundred years the Tasmanian government treated my people with distain, disrespect, humiliation and caused pain and hurt. To be a good and fair government, I understand that you want to be inclusive by accepting people that self-identify. However, the reality is that you are still controlling the narrative on who is an Aboriginal person. Organisations main role, should be service delivery and not Land or Treaty. Land and Treaty sits with the people.

It is important that the objection clause remains in the Aboriginal Lands Act 1995 for Aboriginal people to control and have true self-determination over Country.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Di Spotswood

Aboriginal community member

