

I write to inform you as a Palawa woman I would like to express my view on the proposed changes to the Aboriginal Lands Act 1995.

It is important that you consider that the Aboriginal community does not want any revisions to the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania's election process. The process was originally established by listening to the community needs and views on the most inclusive and culturally appropriate process. This process allows the community the greatest access and transparent method of electing Aboriginal people to facilitate a very important function within our community. It reflects a community endorsed pathway and allows elements of self determination and community control to guide important aspects of community decision making.

The Aboriginal community endorsed the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania as the body set up as a collective ownership model and all community members are included and have the right to take part in its governance.

The land council structure was trusted to facilitated the ownership of community owned lands. In other organisational structures, rights are only given to members on the organisations membership list. This organisational structure is not supported, as all lands across lutruwita are equally significant to all Aboriginal people. The organisational structure is exclusive and any transfer of ownership of land to organisations will exclude Aboriginal people across Tasmania. For this reason I feel we must maintain the current structure as facilitated by ALCT, the only structure that allows for inclusive transparent involvement from all Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

The current process allows Aboriginal people to challenge anyone applying to get on the roll who is not Aboriginal. Anyone challenged must prove their eligibility through an Aboriginal Panel appointed by the Tasmanian Electoral Commissioner. This is a appropriate, transparent, and fair process.

I believe this process is in line with many other main stream election or eligibility processes and should remain in all fairness to all Aboriginal people.

It is important to understand that the return of land from across Tasmania must continue to be a priority for Tasmanian governments. This is integral to the building of a strong relationship with the Aboriginal people of Tasmania and to the reconciliation process. Return of land to the Aboriginal community aids in the healing of past wrongs, and assists in the building of a strong, culturally rich Aboriginal community. It will lead to future economic opportunities and assist in the developing of culturally appropriate Health and well being programs to address the closing the gap initiatives.

However for any of these benefits to flow from the return of land to Aboriginal people, the land must be cared for in a process that allows for community control. Aboriginal land managers who look after Aboriginal land, are experienced, and have the deep knowledge and expertise to care for our country and its resources.

The current land managers are experienced and have a proven record that they can care for our country in a united way, maintaining cultural resources and access for all Aboriginal people.

The community land managers and cultural workers understand that all lands across lutruwita are equally significant to all Aboriginal people and they undertake these roles with integrity and are always inclusive when providing access and caring for country programs .

The Tasmanian Aboriginal community has said they want to see the return of all Crown Lands to Tasmanian Aboriginal people. We see this as a priority and understand this would require the increase of future resources and land management workers.

The development of training and culturally knowledgeable land managers has never been and will never be a government decision. These community based responsibilities are a part of community self determination and community control over sacred cultural knowledge.

If the process of managing Aboriginal lands and sacred landscapes is handed over to organisations and not the Aboriginal community, then the protection of these significant landscapes and sacred sites will be deteriorated potentially lost or destroyed forever. The destruction of Aboriginal heritage and sacred landscapes will be seen as a direct result of the actions of the government not listening to the Aboriginal community.

Responsibility for the future care of our cultural lands must remain in the hands of the Aboriginal community and this is best facilitated through maintaining the current process under the Aboriginal Lands Act 1995.

Sharnie Read