

House of Assembly Standing Committee on Community Development

Term of Reference:

Inquire into and report upon: -

- (a) Proposals for amending the Tasmanian constitution to recognize Aboriginal people as Tasmania's first people;
- (b) and matters incidental thereto.

Background

I grew up on Flinders Island, went to school with a number of people from the Aboriginal community. I have spent time with an aboriginal leader in central Australia as well as coaching two young Tasmanian aboriginals who have started a tour business in southern Tasmania. In my role as

I have worked closely with some of the Elders in an effort to procure the future of Wybalenna one of Tasmania's most historic sites.

Recognition of our first Tasmanians

I believe we should recognize Aboriginal people as Tasmania's first people in the Tasmanian constitution. It's an important step in reconciliation for a community that is only now starting to show their true value to the community as a whole.

Recognition in the constitution is only part of the story, if we are to achieve real reconciliation we must be prepared to admit to the terrible deeds that were inflicted on the Aboriginal tribes either through war by individuals Government decreed or otherwise or incarceration at Wybalenna. This along with the recognition that land was taken away would go part way to assisting the process of reconciliation. As part of this process there is I believe a need incorporate the recognition into the Tasmania culture as we do for Anzac Day so that its not something that is forgotten by future generations.

As an example the Flinders Council has in cooperation with the islands Aboriginal community the Furneaux Festival held at the same time as the Australia Day weekend. This activity has brought both communities to celebrate what it is to live, work and play together in the islands. The Flinders Council was first to fly the Aboriginal flag. It is a fine example of how a community can move forward in a positive way.

Community support

There is a strong need to consider a way of breaking the circle of many within the Aboriginal community of ended up for example on drugs and alcohol and therefore not being able to make a worthwhile contribution to their community. A mentoring or coaching program designed to build confidence while at the same time recognizing their customs and family could be one way of assisting individual and family development.

My recent experience in coaching the two principals at Trowunna Tours has demonstrated with a little encouragement, support and recognition can go along way to achieving a positive outcome. In their case they have gone the hard yards in getting the business to a point where it's operational I have provided suggestions and more important encouragement. Working behind the scenes, listening and providing support can make a huge difference in achieving a positive outcome for the Aboriginal community.

Wybalenna

The establishment of the Aboriginal Land Council Tasmania (ALCT) was a positive outcome for the community however its management and local involvement has been a disappointment to the Aboriginal community on Flinders Island. There had been an expectation the Wybalenna would be managed by the local community. There is still a strong desire for the community to be involved in the management of Wybalenna.

Wybalenna is I believe the most historic site in Tasmania with over one hundred Aboriginal grave in the cemetery. The cemetery has a shared European history and is still used by the Flinders Island community and despite that it's under the control of ALCT. As a result of neglect by ALCT both the Chapel and cemetery are in poor condition. In the case of the Chapel it is need of mayor restoration. The issue is that ALCT don't have the expertise to manage a property that has a significant place in our history.

Wybalenna could play a major role in the education of our Aboriginal history as well as being a historic site of interest to the wider Australia community. It is a place where many visitors learn at first hand the history of Tasmanian Aborigines.

The time is right for the Committee to consider ways to facilitate an agreement for the local community to take control of the management of Wybalenna.