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Leader of the House

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14 MAR 2025

Mr Simon Scott
Committee Secretary
Public Accounts Committee
E: [REDACTED]

Dear Mr Scott

Thank you for the letter from the Hon Ruth Forrest MLC, Chair of the Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Accounts, dated 26 February 2025.

I welcome the opportunity to provide an update on the University of Tasmania's (UTAS) Newnham Campus land title condition.

As the Committee would be aware, UTAS's Newnham Campus land is subject to a condition on title requiring it be used for educational purposes by UTAS, with the title reverting to the Crown if UTAS ceases to use it for such purposes.

Under the Launceston City Deal, which has facilitated the relocation of UTAS's main campus from Newnham to Inveresk, the Government agreed that it would remove the educational condition to enable UTAS to redevelop the Newnham land under an agreed Master Plan. A portion of the Newnham land (Lot 2) was earmarked for sale to the Department of Defence (DoD) for construction of a Defence Cadet Training Facility (DCTF).

In mid-2022, when preparations to remove the condition on title were underway, it was identified that the originally proposed method was no longer suitable, necessitating an alternative solution. UTAS was provided with a solution to enable the sale of land to DoD without disadvantage while the process to remove the condition on the remaining land was completed.

This resulted in lengthy commercial and legal negotiations with an in-principle agreement eventually being reached, which was subject to Ministerial approvals. Following these negotiations, various documents were drafted and shared with UTAS to formalise the agreement.

I am pleased to report that following these extensive negotiations, the Newnham Campus was surrendered back to the Crown in December 2024. After surrender, the site was leased back to UTAS for continued operation, and a sale contract for Lot 2 was exchanged between DoD and the Crown in February. I am also pleased to advise the Committee that settlement of this sale occurred in mid-March.

This now enables DoD to commence construction of the DCTF, a multimillion-dollar project that will deliver significant benefits not only to Launceston's northern suburbs but also to the broader community, fostering strategic alignment with the defence industry. I would like to formally acknowledge DoD's patience and professionalism as we navigated the complex issues with UTAS.

As part of the negotiated agreement, the Government has committed to endeavouring to transfer the remaining Newnham land back to UTAS free of the condition on title, allowing UTAS to continue redevelopment under the agreed Master Plan. This process will involve tabling a motion before both Houses of Parliament under the Crown Lands Act.

The Tasmanian Government remains committed to honouring its agreements and looks forward to the timely resolution of this matter.

Thank you again for the opportunity to respond to the Committee's inquiries.

Yours sincerely

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Eric Abetz.

Eric Abetz MP
Minister for Business, Industry and Resources