

Minister for Human Services
Minister for Community Development
Minister for Climate Change
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22 JUL 2013

Hon Kerry Finch MLC
Chair
Legislative Council Sessional Committee Government Administration B
Parliament House
HOBART TAS 7000

Dear Mr Finch

Kerry

I would like to take this opportunity to restate the Government's support for the *Aboriginal Lands Amendment Bill 2012* which was passed unanimously by the House of Assembly on 21 June 2012. It was introduced into the Legislative Council on 28 June 2012 before being deferred until 15 November 2012, then subsequently sent to the Legislative Council Sessional Committee Government Administration B for further consideration.

It has been eight years since the last land return to the Aboriginal community. Land return is an important step in the reconciliation process as it promotes an acknowledgement of the historical and cultural significance of land to the Aboriginal community.

In 2006, the Government signed a 40 year lease with the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania (ALCT), the body responsible for managing land returned to the Aboriginal community, to manage the land at *larapuna* (Eddystone Point). Since then, significant work has been undertaken to upgrade the site and its facilities.

The ALCT has continued to work with the local community and the broader Aboriginal community in a manner respectful of both the Aboriginal and European heritage of the *larapuna* site. This has given the Government great confidence in knowing that, by formally giving ownership and land title to the ALCT, this work will continue to be undertaken successfully.

Significantly, the *larapuna* site will also retain its historic site status under the *Nature Conservation Act 2002* and will continue to be included in the Tasmanian Heritage Register under the *Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995*. As well as an assurance that there will continue to be public access to the Lighthouse, these measures should reassure the wider community that the return of *larapuna* will benefit not only the Aboriginal community but the Tasmanian community more generally.

Rebecca Creek is an area which is rich in Aboriginal cultural sites. The sites contain spongolite which Aborigines used for the production of stone tools. It is therefore appropriate that the Aboriginal community is best placed to manage these sites and undertake long term planning to ensure cultural preservation.

Due to the sensitivity of the sites, the property will remain closed to the wider public as it is at present. Such an approach is consistent with professional advice received that limiting access is the best way to preserve the Aboriginal heritage at Rebecca Creek.

A comprehensive package of information was provided to the Legislative Council after the Bill was passed in the House of Assembly. The package included a fact sheet, clause notes, Second Reading Speech and Central Register Plans showing public access routes. The Second Reading Speech explains that the primary purpose of the Bill is to amend Section 27 and Schedule 3 of the *Aboriginal Lands Act 1995* to enable the transfer of land at Rebecca Creek and *larapuna* to the Aboriginal community.

The Government remains committed to land return, a process which began in 1995. The return of Rebecca Creek and *larapuna* to the Aboriginal community would represent a significant statement of support and reiterate previous Governments' commitment to the return of land as fundamental to a successful reconciliation process and recognition of Aboriginal cultural heritage.

This Bill received tripartisan support in the House of Assembly. I therefore trust that this further statement of support for the return of *larapuna* and Rebecca Creek assists with a favourable outcome when the Committee meets to discuss the Bill.

If there is any additional information or support your Committee requires to assist it in its consideration of the Bill please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Cassy O'Connor MP
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs