

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL Question On Notice

Tuesday, 28 August 2018

1593. Hon Robin Chappie to the Minister for Environment representing the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs

In 1994, the Rottnest Island Deaths Group Aboriginal Corporation (RIDGAC) held a Statewide Meeting of Aboriginal Lore/Law People on Wadjemup/Rottnest Island who made culturally appropriate decisions regarding the future protection and preservation of the Island's Aboriginal Sacred issues. From this Statewide Meeting RIDGAC was appointed to be the only recognized Custodians who were to handle all Aboriginal issues on Wadjemup. RIDGAC initiated an initial investigation by Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) with Rottnest Island Authority (RIA), which discovered the first Sacred Men's Burial Ground. RIDGAC then requested the removal of the Allison Cabins and more GPR to take place, which resulted in the discovery of more Ancestors' Burials. RIDGAC has since then been requesting for more GPR to be carried out into the Rottnest Resort/Golf Course. Since RIA and its agents continually publicise that they will consult with Stakeholders and that they want reconciliation, I ask:

- (a) why has further GPR been denied in that area;
- (b) as there is evidence of another burial ground on the southern side of the Quod in the Settlement Area, will more GPR be undertaken at both the southern end of the Quod and into the golf course and other areas before anything is done as recognition of Burial Sites;
- (c) if no to (b), why not;
- (d) RIDGAC Director, Iva Hayward-Jackson objected to the pathway around the known burial ground and has been allegedly threatened by the officer in charge, Graham Bond, and ordered to report to Mr Bond every time he goes to Rottnest Island with the consent of the current CEO, Michelle Reynolds. Why has progress by RIDGAC been hampered by the police and RIA;
- (e) why was the introduction of the Rottnest Reference Group, founded by former RIA CEO, Paolo Amarati, used for the cultural duties regarding the Sacred Burial Grounds instead of RIDGAC;
- (f) all attempts by RIDGAC to be primary consultants on Aboriginal issues on Wadjemup have been ignored by the RIA. Instead, two culturally inappropriate groups have been installed by RIA, which have given only a (sometime) cursory nod to RIDGAC, treating the organisation as an outsider. Is this a direct contravention of the directions given by the statewide representatives of their Ancestors who suffered and died on Wadjemup;
- (g) if no to (f), why not;
- (h) initially, RIDGAC was advised by the newly appointed CEO, Michelle Reynolds, that she agreed to a full and proper consultation process with RIDGAC grass roots Law Men and others from communities throughout Western Australia. Has RIDGAC been adequately supported, notified and funded to be able to attend the meetings;
- (i) if yes to (h), how;
- (j) if no to (h), why not;
- (k) when is RIA planning to fully and properly consult with RIDGAC and the grassroots initiated Law Men and their families according to Aboriginal law and culture;
- (l) is RIA planning to include all statewide Elders/Law Men in this consultation;

(m) what funds have been put aside by RIA and/or its agencies for full and proper consultations with RIDGAC and their grass roots communities and Law Men throughout Western Australia;

(n) is the Government aware that the consultative process, as outlined by RIA for the September meeting, is highly culturally inappropriate and in direct conflict with the directions given by Senior Law Men and their families in 1994, and is also in direct conflict with the Law People and their families today who are the direct descendants of the Ancestors who suffered and died;

(o) if no to (n), why not;

(p) in terms of the answer to (n), is the Government willing to rectify this situation;

(q) when will RIDGAC be funded in order to return to the Law Men and Elders and their communities throughout the State of Western Australia (and beyond), to again arrange consultation process and accommodation that was guaranteed by the CEO of RIA for meetings on Wadjemup with RIA in good faith;

(r) when will the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs meet with RIDGAC Board of Directors in order to provide further funding and facilities so that full and proper consultation in good faith can take place with the Cultural Law People who have Ancestors who suffered and died on Wadjemup;

(s) is the Minister aware that the processes being employed by RIA and/or its agents regarding Aboriginal heritage is in breach of Aboriginal Lore/Law, Customs and Traditions regarding Sacred Burial Grounds;

(t) in terms of the answer to (s), what does the Minister plan to do to rectify the problem;

(u) early in 2017, a meeting was arranged with the Minister of Tourism where nothing came of RIDGAC's culturally appropriate plans. All attempts since the election of the McGowan Government to meet with the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs so that an appropriate meeting could take place regarding proper treatment of Wadjemup Sacred Sites, have been denied. I ask:

(i) why was RIDGAC asked to meet with the Minister for Tourism instead of Minister for Aboriginal Affairs;

(ii) why have all attempts to meet with the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs been denied;

(iii) will the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs meet with RIDGAC;

(iv) if yes to (u)(iii), when; and

(v) if no to (u)(iii), why not;

(v) is the Minister aware that it is culturally inappropriate for this burial ground to be developed as a tourist attraction;

(w) will the Minister be willing to fully and properly consult with the recognised Custodians in good faith so that any decisions will be culturally appropriate;

(x) if yes to (w), who does the Minister recognise as the Custodians of Wadjemup;

(y) is the Minister aware that real reconciliation cannot take place until Wadjemup is properly developed as a place of suffering and death of the Ancestors, and sites designated by the Ancestors' descendants are treated with dignity, respect and understanding;

(z) is the Government going to address the fact that the RIA, by now holding their structured meeting in September 2018, have interfered with the cultural process that was set up for RIDGAC Law Men and grass roots communities to be there in September and have their voices heard, and that the RIA and its agencies have embarrassed the First Nations Peoples by disrupting a culturally appropriate process that was going to plan;

(aa) if no to (z), why not;

(bb) if yes to (z), how;

(cc) will the Government address the problem that the first trips to organise stakeholders to attend a culturally appropriate meeting on Wadjemup in September was funded by RIDGAC

and donations, and acknowledge that without funding or power to revisit, the culturally inappropriate process outlined by RIA Board cannot be corrected;

(dd) if no to (cc), why not;

(ee) if yes to (cc), how;

(ff) regarding the cultural services by companies appointed by the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the CEO of RIA and their appointed Reference Group, to advise on plans for the Ancestor's remains:

(i) was approval for their services sought from RIDGAC;

(ii) is it appropriate that these companies are able to advise on plans for the Ancestral remains, which overrides the grass roots Cultural People throughout the State who have a direct connection to the Ancestors;

(iii) is the Minister aware that according to Law Men and Elders, the existing burial site works by Indigenous Economic Solutions may have desecrated the site;

(iv) regarding (ff)(iii), will the Minister investigate if this is true or not;

(v) is the Minister aware that RIDGAC has been policed by the RIA and Rottnest police so as to not interfere with RIA's plans for the Ancestors' Remains; and

(vi) regarding (ff)(v), is this an appropriate course of action given RIDGAC was appointed to be the only recognised Custodians who were to handle all Aboriginal issues on Wadjemup;

(gg) is it appropriate for the Minister for Tourism and his department to be in charge of the extremely important and sensitive Aboriginal Sacred Burial Sites and other issues to do with Wadjemup/Rottnest Island; and

(hh) how is the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs ensuring RIA and the Department for Tourism are not mismanaging and/or misinterpreting Aboriginal Sacred Burial Sites and other issues to do with Wadjemup/Rottnest Island?

Answer

(a-q) Refer to the Minister for Tourism.

(r) The Minister is being kept advised about consultations with Aboriginal community interests throughout Western Australia that are currently taking place under the broad responsibility of the Rottnest Island Authority.

(s) The Rottnest Island Authority have complied with their obligations under the Aboriginal Heritage Act.

(t) Not applicable

(u)(i) The Minister for Tourism is the Minister responsible for the Rottnest Island Authority.

(ii) The Minister is fully aware that the RIA is being advised by the Wadjemup Aboriginal Reference Group which is guiding RIA's engagement with an Aboriginal community interest's engagement process.

(iii) See (r)

(iv) Not applicable

(v) Not applicable

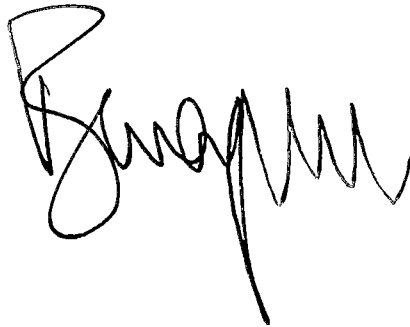
(v) The Minister does not consider the work-taking place at the burial ground as related to a tourist attraction.

(w) See (r)

(x) Not applicable

(y) The Minister has confidence in the current engagement and investigative process will lead to recommendations for appropriate memorials to acknowledge the suffering that took place on Rottnest Island. It is the minister's hope that Wadjemup could play an important place in the story of the State's reconciliation.

(z-hh) Refer to Minister for Tourism.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Wadjemup". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a large initial letter 'B' and a long, sweeping underline.