

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
Question Without Notice

Wednesday, 10 June 2020

C589. Hon Tim Clifford to the Minister for Environment representing the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs

I refer to the ABC RN Broadcast on Tue 9 Jun 2020, 6:06pm, in which Federal Minister for Indigenous Australians voiced his support for the protest at Rio Tinto Headquarters, and I ask:

1. Does the Minister share the views of his Federal counterpart that *“we cannot afford to have any site destroyed”*?
2. Does the Minister agree with his Federal counterpart that Indigenous Elders should go out onto Country and *“make sure they check on those sites to ensure there is no further damage done”*?
3. If yes to (2), does the Minister believe the onus for protecting sites is on individual knowledge-holders?
4. Given that the Federal Minister makes specific reference to sites destroyed by railway, will the Minister consider a review of the Eliwana Rail Project?

Answer

(1)-(3) The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs did not listen to the broadcast to which the Member refers and as a consequence is not aware of the context in which these statements were made.

The Minister strongly believes that Traditional Owners need to have a greater say in relation to the protection and management of their heritage. He wants to lessen the role the Government plays in decisions around heritage and increase the authority of Traditional Owners. The proposed Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act will ensure better protection of important places for Aboriginal people and encourage agreement-making between traditional owners and land users and in doing so will empower Traditional Owners – prioritising Aboriginal voices in heritage management. It will also provide a process to recognise arrangements that currently exist between many proponents and Traditional Owners whereby Traditional Owners have a say in relation to what happens to their heritage.

The Minister wants to see impacts to Aboriginal sites limited to the practical extent possible. He is also a great believer in self-determination for Aboriginal people and supports native title groups using their hard-won rights to make commercial agreements with land users. He is cautious about governments interfering in private negotiations by registered native title holders.

Traditional Owners know their country better than anyone. Any concerns relating to impacts to an Aboriginal heritage site can be reported to the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage. The Department also offers a grant program to assist Traditional Owners in managing their sites.

(4) The Eliwana Rail Project, like all projects, needs to comply with all approval processes, including those required by the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972*.



MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

