

Response to Scrutiny of NT Aboriginal Sacred Sites Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

By Grusha Leeman April 4 2025

Thank-you for taking my suggestions into consideration.

Firstly, I must admit to being appalled: sensible **improvements suggested by AAPA** who have long been advocating to update the legislation in order to increase efficiency and appropriateness, were completely ignored. Please do try to make things better, especially as suggested by those involved. Start again, by taking the AAPA advice on board.

Please be respectful and **extend the consultation** and response time. A week to respond to such changes is deplorable. The Sacred Sites Act is about Aboriginal sacred places, and Aboriginal people need to be consulted on changes. It is shameful to rush through poorly-considered changes to laws that will threaten Traditional Owners' rights and interests without consulting them.

I see no valid reason for allowing the Minister to increase the number of government members on the board. Enabling covert ministerial control over what is supposed to be an impartial body safeguarding sacred sites, undermines the purpose of the board to the point of extreme disrespect.

The transferability of authority **certificates** threatens to remove valuable and important protections. It is not acceptable to circumvent the views of the current traditional owners. A new project may well impact a sacred site in a different way, and so transferability is anathema to properly taking care.

The legislation reframes the Authority's core role, from one of cultural protection to one of procedural facilitation for land use. It prioritises "certainty and processes for economic development" at the expense of cultural authority, legal integrity, and traditional consent, which is a significant departure from the principles of the Sacred Sites Act and the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976. Please reject it.

I am concerned as to the purpose of this huge and rude proposal. We need stronger sacred sites law, not weaker. How often has the sacred sites legislation unnecessarily held up development proposals? Is there one concrete example? And is there an abstract example of how these powers are likely to be applied in the future?

The ancient cultures of the Northern Territory should be cherished not extinguished. Consent must be sought fully and properly each and every time. Australia: always was and always will be Aboriginal land.