

## **Response to Scrutiny of NT Aboriginal Sacred Sites**

### **Legislation Amendment Bill 2025**

By Lorraine Gibson Napaltjari April 4, 2025

Thank you for taking my suggestions into consideration.

Firstly, I would like to state that the Sacred Sites Bill Enables Political Control and Strips power from Aboriginal Custodians, these proposed amendments to the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989, warning the changes dismantle independent statutory protections and expose sacred sites to political and commercial interference.

If this Act is gutted, the only thing standing between sacred Country and bulldozers will be a Minister with a conflict of interest. That is a breach of trust and a legal disgrace.

Weve said this before and we'll say it again: if the Crown insists on rewriting the rules, let it start by proving that this land was terra nullius. We never ceded it. And we will not stand in silence and allow this government to legislate away our inherent rights as custodians.

#### **Legal Red flags in the Proposed Bill**

##### **1. Ministerial Overreach and Political Interference**

The amendments allow the Minister to appoint two Authority members. This opens the door to covert political influence, where ministerial appointees can be used to sway decisions or target Aboriginal members whose views conflict with pro-development agendas.

##### **2. Undermining Cultural Lore and Statutory Safeguards**

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-a significant departure from the principles of the Sacred Sites Act and Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976.

##### **3. Eroding Custodian Control Over Site Access**

Provisions that allow Authority Certificates to be transferred between parties-without new consultation with traditional owners-dilute the authority of custodians and reduce the consultation process to a one-time administrative box-tick. This severs future decision-makers from cultural accountability and opens sacred sites to long-term exploitation without renewed consent.

The sensible **improvements suggested by AAPA** who have long been advocating to update the legislation to increase efficiency and appropriateness, were completely ignored. Please do try to make things better, especially as suggested by those involved. Take the AAPA advice onboard.

Be respectful and **extend the consultation** and response time. A week to respond to such changes is not only insulting it is ridiculous, we do not do business this way.

The Sacred Sites Act is about our sacred places, we need to be consulted on any proposed changes. This consultation needs more than a week, our Senior Elders need to discuss these proposed amendments the Government are pushing and the legal aspects to it under our own LORE.

Please be respectful and **extend the consultation** and response time.

It is shameful to rush through poorly considered changes to laws that will threaten our rights and interests.

As a Warumungu, Warlmanpa, Mudburra, Jingili Lore Women I am deeply concerned and disgusted with this rushed proposal. If anything we need stronger sacred site laws, not weaker.

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.

Lorraine Gibson Napaltjari