



Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Ltd.

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21 December 2005

The Honourable Gavin Jennings
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Department for Victorian Communities
GPO 2392V
MELBOURNE Victoria 3001

Dear Minister Jennings,

Re: Aboriginal Heritage Bill

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Aboriginal Heritage Bill (Bill).

At this stage, VALS does not wish to engage with the Government about the detail of the Bill, but simply requests a moratorium on the Bill. VALS argues that the Government should pay attention to Indigenous Australians who are calling for the Bill to be stopped because they are dissatisfied with it. In general terms, VALS is concerned that the operation of the Bill will work to divide Indigenous Australians, such as Traditional Owners of land and people who have a historical tie to the land.

Traditional Owners and other Indigenous Australians must be allowed the time to make whatever arrangements are most appropriate by which to accommodate all their needs and the needs of the non-Indigenous Australian community. VALS requests that the Government slow down the passage of the Bill so that Indigenous Australians can be given the time to come together to enter into discussions about cultural heritage. Also, it is essential that adequate resources are provided in order to make such discussions possible.

The Bill should only be passed once the issues within the Bill, identified by the Indigenous Australian community, have been substantively resolved to the satisfaction of a wide cross-section of the Indigenous Australian community. This can only be achieved if the Government commits to giving Indigenous Australians the time to enter into discussions about cultural heritage and the necessary resources.

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me on 9419 3888.

Yours Sincerely

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Limited

Frank E. Guivarra
Chief Executive Officer