



CLC calls for federal government to help protect sacred NT sites

The Central Land Council backs calls for the federal government to intervene in Aboriginal heritage protection as it did when Robert Tickner saved a sacred Arrernte women's site from a CLP government in the 1990s.

CLC chair Warren Williams supports the fight of the Larrakia traditional owners of the Darwin waterfront to protect their sacred site and the independence of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

He said forcing the AAPA to rubber stamp the insertion of two new parties in a 20-year-old sacred site clearance certificate without consulting with the traditional owners about changes to the waterfront development illustrates why the council fought the changes to the NT's Sacred Sites Act.

"This is the first test of the controversial changes and it fails the traditional owners, just as we predicted," he said. "My heart goes out to the traditional owners. We will stand with them in their fight for their right to protect their sacred site."

He said the changes have turned the AAPA into an instrument of the CLP and removed a champion of Aboriginal rights from the authority's board, as intended by the government.

"I commend Rachel Perkins for taking a principled stand and share the concerns of the remaining AAPA members who find themselves in an impossible position," Mr Williams said.

CLC chief executive Les Turner recalled how former Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Robert Tickner used his powers under federal heritage laws to stop a dam north of Alice Springs that would have flooded a sacred Arrernte women's site.

"The CLP government has just demonstrated why it can never be trusted to protect our sacred sites," he said. "It's time for the federal government to step in again."

"The federal government should clarify the power of the NT government to make laws to protect our sacred sites and work with our land councils and traditional owners to strengthen heritage protections."

Mr Williams has written to NT Minister Josh Burgoyne about this latest action and reminded him of his promises to the CLC when he addressed the council about the changes to the sacred sites legislation in April.

"You told our council that AAPA certificates could be transferred only if companies are *'doing the exact same work,'*" he wrote.

Mr Burgoyne wrote to the CLC in May and confirmed that certificates could be transferred or have additional parties added, *"as long as the proposed work and use of the land are the same."*

However, the current waterfront hotel project is very different from what Larrakia were consulted about for the 2004 certificate and they have consistently said it will impact their sacred site.

"You did not listen to our concerns or amend the legislation to prevent this occurring," Mr Williams wrote to the minister.

"You were not a man of your word and you did not make sure the protections you promised were included in the final legislation," he wrote. "You have placed our sacred sites and our culture at risk."

26 September 2025