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Member for Nhulunbuy, NT Legislative Assembly



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Burial and Cremation Bill is not local decision-making

The Northern Territory Government is ignoring their own policy of local decision-making, and providing no genuine respect to traditional authorities or law.

While it continues to talk about working with local authorities and communities, when it comes to matters that are of great importance to many Aboriginal communities, the Government has not spent the time listening, being inclusive, and getting it right. The Burial and Cremation Bill was an opportunity to bring two cultures together in harmony.

“We feel the Government are making decisions for us. They are choosing not to listen to our people when we want to tell them Burial customs comes under our law.

We are on our land burying our people according to our tradition and custom. This is not your business. But if you want to discuss it with us, come and meet with our elders – we will direct you about what is okay.

This is what local-decision making is all about. And this Government needs some very strong lessons about what local decision-making means. They say that the Council Local Authority Groups were consulted on this Bill. But there is not one elder in community that has known about the detail of this Bill when I have discussed it. Where is the local-decision making? Is this Government genuine about working in partnership with Aboriginal Nations?

This Government is introducing a law that disrespects our culture, and our authority and criminalises our elders and leaders.”

The Burial and Cremation Bill was referred to the Social Policy Scrutiny Committee in August 2019, and despite receiving submissions that raised serious concerns from the NLC, CLC, NAAJA, the Galpu and Golpu Clans of Elcho Island, and the Member for Nhulunbuy, and hearing evidence from many of these groups, the Committee have tabled their report to the Assembly with no recommendations to amend any part of the legislation.

The introduction of the Burial and Cremation Bill this week will criminalise the actions of many Aboriginal people who bury their family members on their own country, outside of a ‘cemetery’ and without the permission of a Darwin based bureaucrat.

The Member for Nhulunbuy will be available at 12pm, at the front of Parliament House, to answer questions.

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