

Tasmanian Regional Aboriginal Community Alliance (TRACA)

Submission to the Review of the Aboriginal and Dual Naming Policy

Background:

When the British arrived in Tasmania, they set about naming places according to their view of the new landscape and place-names that were familiar to those they left behind in England. This was a deliberate act to colonise or Europeanise the land and seascapes. The First People were considered part of the fauna and flora of the land and were not asked what their place-names were.

From a present day perspective, Aboriginal people regard these colonising behaviours as another way to displace and dispossess Aboriginal clanspeople of their social, cultural and spiritual connections with Country, and an attempt to eradicate over 40,000 years of human presence. The introduction of European names ignored the diverse languages that existed since the coming of time.

In her Doctoral Thesis Dr. Linn Miller wrote of Anthropologist Robert Tonkinson recalling a haunting experience of a father from the central desert who went on a long journey to find his daughter who had been taken from her homelands when she was young. The father found his daughter and started on a journey to bring her home. As they moved over the land, the father called out the language names of Country in his mother's language and he called out the names of Country in his father's language.

'He called placenames, verbally travelling first through his mother's country, which is where his children had grown up, calling each waterhole, each hill and creek, marking its extent and indicating the Dreaming'. He was invoking the memory of Country all the way home. The father was providing his daughter the deepest consolation possible of his love for her through her belonging to the land. He asserted 'All that, that's all your country now'.

Miller concluded that 'This story most graphically demonstrates the power and profundity that the ordered and ordering narrative of placescape has in relation to the psychological terrain of Aboriginal peoples'. (Dr. Linn Miller, (2005) *Being and Belonging*).

The appropriate renaming of places on Country is a vital way for Aboriginal people to reconnect with their lands and all the things that belong to, and defines 'Country'. It is a way of honoring the ancestors and communicating with country as Aboriginal people in today's world. However, the process and mechanism must be inclusive.

The seven member organisations of TRACA, wholeheartedly support the concept of the dual naming of Country and its features. TRACA acknowledges that language is a powerful tool especially in regards to renaming Country using Aboriginal names for geographic places and landmarks that were spoken by the First People and custodians of this land.

TRACA acknowledges that regional communities who continue to care for their Country have been excluded from participating in the dual naming process and the selection of place names in their regions, with the control of this process left to one Aboriginal organisation, namely the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC). TRACA members representing their individual regional communities seek the right to authentic participation and consultation in any dual naming process as it applies in their region. TRACA members also wish to emphasise that all traditional names and language used in the dual naming process that apply to each members region (Country) requires the endorsement of the applicable regional communities organisation.

The Premier of Tasmania has made a commitment to resetting relationships with all Aboriginal people and this Aboriginal and Dual Naming Policy Review is one of the responses by government to that commitment. The Premier was emphatic that policy development should be inclusive and reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of all Tasmanian Aboriginal people. TRACA is therefore requesting that the outcome of this review follow the Premier's commitment to bring about change by being inclusive of all peoples and Aboriginal communities in Tasmania.

The seven TRACA member organisations cover a wide geographic area of Tasmanian and its islands (refer to attached map):

- Circular Head Aboriginal Corporation in the northwest region
- Six Rivers Aboriginal Corporation in the central and northern coast,
- Melythina Tiakana Warrana Aboriginal Corporation (MTWAC) in the northeast,
- Flinders Island Aboriginal Association Incorporated (FIAAI) on Flinders Island,
- Parrdarrama Pungenna Aboriginal Corporation (PPAC) in the east coast and Tasman Peninsula,
- Weetapoonna on Bruny Island, and
- South Eastern Tasmanian Aboriginal Corporation (SETAC) in the southeast.

Issue 1: Nomination of Aboriginal and Dual Name Proposals

1.1: TRACA holds the view that appropriate processes to guide public nomination of Tasmanian Aboriginal language names under the Aboriginal and Dual Naming Policy must be formally endorsed in writing by regional Aboriginal communities through their organisations. Local Aboriginal communities should be consulted through their local organisations before any approach is made to the Nomenclature Board.

Issue 2: Authenticating Aboriginal and dual names

2.1 TRACA supports a register of supplementary organisations or individuals that may provide expert advice on the authentication of proposed Aboriginal and dual names with the proviso that TRACA endorses that register.

2.2 TRACA supports the proposal for the inclusion of minimum standards for accompanying information to be submitted to the Nomenclature Board with name proposals pending further detail.

2.3 TRACA supports enabling the Nomenclature Board to consult or engage with local groups or entities if it considers that doing so may improve its decision making on proposed Aboriginal and dual names.

Issue 3: Local Aboriginal and dual naming

3.1 TRACA to have a formal role to oversee improved opportunities for consultation with all Aboriginal organisations and communities, with a view to enhance consultation and engagement with organisations and communities that have specific interests in the locations where Aboriginal and dual names are proposed.

Issue 4: palawa kani and the use, spelling, pronunciation and writing of Tasmanian Aboriginal languages under the Policy

4.1 In its present form the Policy allows palawa kani to dictate the use, spelling, pronunciation of a contrived language for Tasmanian places and geological features and this is unacceptable to TRACA members. TRACA members consider the application of palawa kani to place names is offensive as it is directed by a Western linguistic construct. TRACA is adamant that historic names and spelling as recorded by those who heard the languages spoken must take precedence over a creole or reconstructed version of recorded Aboriginal placenames. The status quo would mean that precious original placenames would be whitewashed and become extinct and that would be a shameful reflection on our ancestors who spoke many languages. This would translate to linguistic genocide.

4.2 TRACA supports name proposals providing they are informed by the diverse Tasmanian languages and supported by historical evidence and research.

4.3 TRACA endorses preference for name proposals to be informed by the language / languages of the original people of the place or feature to be named.

4.4 TRACA supports the view that where more than one name is recorded or known for the one feature or place the local community/organisation should decide whether one name or several names are culturally appropriate. It may be that more than one name for a place or landmark is acknowledged and they should be allocated. Aboriginal and dual naming of Country does not translate to how the Western world views names as a convenience.

4.5 TRACA supports the proposal that where a place or feature has more than one name describing parts of the feature or place, appropriately name each part based on historical evidence, local knowledge and research. There are authentic references to more than one name and they should be retained where it is culturally appropriate to do so. For example; East Mt Cameron has three peaks with different names for each peak. The Blue Tier has three named peaks. The South Esk River has three names that reflects the nuance of the river's journey- Mangana Lienta (translates to *big water*) at its source in the Ben Lomond Ranges, Moronoone as it winds past Perth and Hadspen and Pleepertoomerla (toomer translates to *fast flowing*) as it runs through the Cataract Gorge. The Tamar River has two names Kanamalukeka for the fresh water above the saltwater mark and Ponrabbel from the freshwater/saltwater mark to the Bass Strait. The above examples demonstrate the complexity of Tasmanian Aboriginal place names and we should celebrate these in the present day.

Issue 5: Consultation, engagement and the role of local government

5.1 TRACA supports the establishment of a set of protocols developed to ensure that all name proposals to the Nomenclature Board are forwarded via the Local Government Association Tasmania (LGAT) to the relevant local council for comment, prior to any formal consideration by the Nomenclature Board.

Issue 6: Replacing place names (including offensive names) with Aboriginal names

6.1 TRACA supports the inclusion of a specific mechanism for the Nomenclature Board to consider and replace all current place names offensive to Aboriginal communities, including those already agreed to under the present policy.

Attachment 1

