

Elder-based approach

Dual naming plan put into practice

BY ADAM HOLMES

A SERIES of On Country visits in recent weeks have given Tasmania's Aboriginal and Dual Naming Reference Group the opportunity to use a new methodology in developing the next steps in Aboriginal place naming.

Among the group was Dr Sarah Jane Moore, adjunct associate lecturer at the University of New South Wales, who has mapped elder-based teachings on the mainland to advance reconciliation through schools and communities, resulting in her PhD.

Central to the work was the experience of being On Country with elders, talking and sharing in a fieldwork model - a methodology developed by Dr Moore, and applied during the visits to Tasmania's North East last month, and North-West last week.

Since February, limitations due to COVID have meant she has had to take part in online meetings with all stakeholders to start her three-year appointment with the reference group. The digital aspect of the work - creating "living documents" - was also important, but nothing could replace the site visits.

So it was with an overwhelming sense of excitement that she was, from August, finally able to carry out the On Country experiences so central to her work.

Dr Moore said she was blown away by the beauty of the North, and being able to experience the special relationship elders had with the country.

"It's a process that's been used for Indigenous communities all over the world. It is about using site visits with community and inviting country to speak as an equal stakeholder," she said.

"It's the why's, the who's, looking at the where, walking to the where, feeling the wind of the where. It's quite a beautiful process.

"It's a deep and wide and time-intensive process that we're embarking on that involves the stakeholders from the regions as equal partners in the work.

"It's listening to each other, and it becomes a living document - not only a

document that exists in text, but exists in relationships and time spent in each of the sites.

"We visit them. We look at them. We learn from them."

The Tasmanian Government introduced a new dual naming policy in 2019 as a way of giving greater power to local Aboriginal groups to have a say on place naming. It came after a political battle between the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, which is reconstructing Aboriginal language through palawa kani, and the government.

The previous policy resulted in 14 official Aboriginal and dual names, including kanamaluka/Tamar River, pinmatik/Rocky Cape and yingina/Great Lake.

The government claimed that local groups were being sidelined and the process was halted after 2016, but the TAC claimed its palawa kani methodology was robust, using historical records and journals to cross-reference and generate word lists with geographic context.

The new policy accepts submissions from groups and individuals before the end of March each year, which are then referred to the reference group. The group assesses these submissions and reports to the Tasmanian Place Names Advisory Panel by the end of September with recommendations for the minister by the end of December. The panel includes the Surveyor-General, a representative from Parks and Wildlife and the Local Government Association and two people with heritage and historical knowledge, among others.

This assessment process prior to making a recommendation is where Dr Moore's methodology comes in.

The reference group could not detail specific sites it was considering for an Aboriginal place name, however images of Mount Cameron and Tomahawk Island were provided as part of the information on the new methodology.

Dr Moore said the work was multi-faceted, and provided a journal article "Uncomfortable Learning: Connection to Country" which detailed her experiences with elders at Ourimbah on NSW's central coast.

"We also look at historical documents. It's elder-led so



SIGNIFICANCE: The sun rises at Tomahawk in the North East, one of the areas that could be recommended for an Aboriginal place name. **Pictures:** supplied



Mount Cameron. The new dual naming methodology has a strong focus on On Country visits and elder experiences.



It's a deep and wide and time-intensive process that we're embarking on that involves the stakeholders from the regions as equal partners in the work.

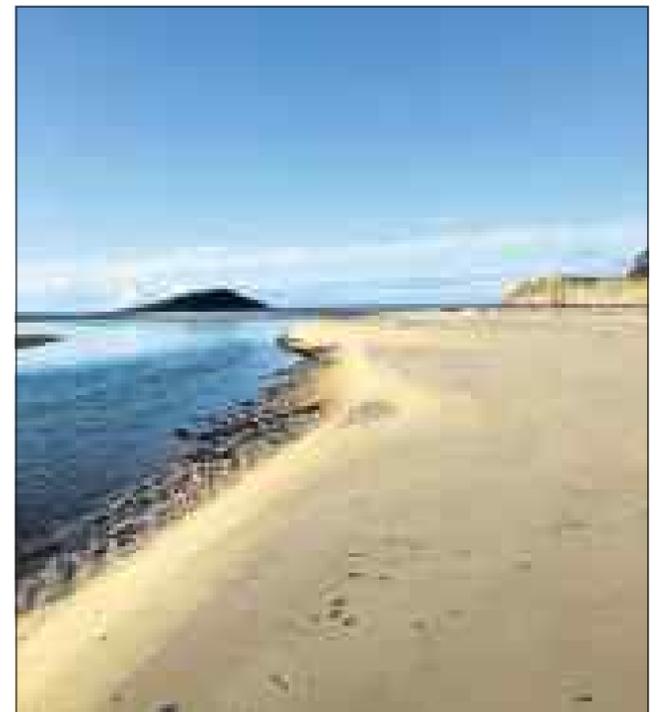
Dr Sarah Jane Moore

we have been working on the last two visits with Aunty Patsy Cameron and most of my research for the last 15 or so years has been in elder-led learning and On Country ways of working, and to understand moving forward in reconciliation spaces in the community," she said.

"It's not a matter of sitting in an office and talking

about dual naming, it's about meeting the people who want those names to exist, speaking to them face-to-face about the background, the history.

"The approach places us in the ongoing dialogues that Indigenous peoples are having and will continue to have so that language is prioritised in its rightful place as an important part of



The beach at Tomahawk. The Aboriginal and Dual Naming Reference Group is currently assessing submissions.

culture, awareness and the passing on of story."

The Tasmanian Regional Aboriginal Communities Alliance - which was established to provide a link between Aboriginal groups and the government - described the August On Country experience, information gathering and research as "very successful".

TRACA co-chair Dr Patsy

Cameron said meeting with the local communities was an important part of the process.

"Physically being there to see the mountains, rivers and bays being proposed to have dual naming gives a sense of connection visually and spiritually to those places, and enables stories of local people to be heard," she said.