

Media Release

The Hon Natalie Hutchins MP
Minister for Jobs and Industry
Minister for Treaty and First Peoples
Minister for Women



Thursday, 29 August 2024

ABORIGINAL BURIAL SITES RETURNED TO TRADITIONAL OWNERS

The Allan Labor Government is ensuring Traditional Owners have greater control over their history at two former Aboriginal mission sites in Victoria.

Minister for Treaty and First Peoples Natalie Hutchins today announced the passing of amendments to the *Aboriginal Lands Act 1991* to give Aboriginal organisations control over the future transfer and use of the Ebenezer and Ramahyuck Mission Cemeteries.

For people across all societies, the places where those who have passed are laid to rest are sacred and significant sites.

The amendments enacted by the *Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2024* will remove restrictions on the transfer of the Ebenezer and Ramahyuck Mission Cemeteries in line with community and titleholders' aspirations to return these sites to Traditional Owners.

The original Act was passed in 1991 to facilitate the transfer of three burial sites at former missions to local Aboriginal organisations, including:

- Coranderrk Mission Cemetery to the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.
- Ebenezer Mission Cemetery to the Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Co-operative.
- Ramahyuck Mission Cemetery to the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative.

However, the Act included restrictions on the transfer and use of the sites, prohibiting titleholders from managing their land as they see fit.

A review of the Act recommended reforms to the management of the Ebenezer and Ramahyuck Mission Cemeteries to enable greater self-determination and empower First Peoples to exercise their cultural, land and property rights.

The Bill passed today also makes amendments to the *Aboriginal Lands Act 1970* which granted freehold title to residents at Framlingham and Lake Tyers, improving governance and operations of these Trusts in another critical step towards a self-determined future for First Nations communities across Victoria.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Treaty and First Peoples Natalie Hutchins

"We're making long-overdue changes to ensure Traditional Owners have greater ownership over these historically and culturally significant Aboriginal burial sites."

"These changes mark a critical step on the pathway to a stronger, self-managed future for Traditional Owners and First Nations communities and reflect our work to progress self-determination for all First Nations People in Victoria, alongside our journey towards Treaty and Truth."