



Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion

Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2022-2023 **ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE**

Asked by **Mrs Elizabeth Kikkert MLA:**

Reference: Hearing on 15 November 2023, Annual Report of Community Services Directorate

In relation to: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and Resolving Historic Issues Relating to Claims of Traditional Custodianship

The Annual report mentions future work supporting 'the resolution of historic issues relating to claims of Traditional Custodianship within the ACT' – issues that remain unresolved.

1. Is the ACT Government currently taking any action to help resolve competing claims in the territory, or will this work need to wait entirely on the establishment of the Eminent Panel (or anything else)? If yes, what action is the government taking?
2. What additional work within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs cannot practically be completed until such issues are resolved? (Presumably, treaty would be one.)

Minister Stephen-Smith: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

1. The ACT Government is working closely with community through this matter, as we recognise there are many stages to achieving culturally safe and considered outcomes for all involved.

The resolution of issues relating to claims of Traditional Custodianship needs to be led by community. Traditional Custodian groups have identified the Native Title process as the most appropriate mechanism to resolve the issue.

The ACT Government is being guided by Traditional Custodians and the voices of all Aboriginal peoples who identify as having a connection to this land. Community healing from the trauma experienced in the past is a holistic process and involves strengthening connections to culture, family and land. This takes time.

This is a multifaceted process that cannot be rushed, with timing determined by community as to when they are ready to proceed to the next stage. ACT Government also needs to be flexible and able to respond to new directions and opportunities as determined by the needs of community.

2. The ACT Government is working to progress all critical bodies of work, including Treaty. As this work is complex and requires involvement from many stakeholders, the Government is not looking to achieve immediate completion. We know that these matters take time.

The Government's focus is on moving through all stages with due diligence, to ensure that key work in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs is thorough, culturally safe and guided by the community in accordance with the principle of self-determination.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion

Signature:



Date:

1/12/23

By the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA