

Northern Land Council calls on the NT Government to delay the introduction of the Burial & Cremation Bill

5 September 2019

At their meeting at Nhulunbuy this week the Northern Land Council's East Arnhem Regional Council urged the Northern Territory Government to delay the introduction of the contentious Burial & Cremation Bill (2018) into the Legislative Assembly at the next sitting.

Earlier today the MLA for Nhulunbuy, Yingiya Mark Guyula spoke about his work in expanding the definition of next of kin so it was culturally acceptable, and his concerns about the Bill.

NLC representatives from Ramingining, Milingimbi, Galiwin'ku, Gapuwiyak, Yirrkala and Blue Mud Bay communities and homeland representatives from across the East Arnhem Region raised concerns and agreed with many of the issues raised by Mr Guyula concerning the burial of their family members in the main communities and particularly on homelands throughout Arnhem Land.

"We are very worried that the Bill might prevent us from following our traditional practices that Yolngu people have practised and continue to practise for many years," said Mr Djawa Yunupingu the Executive Member.

"We are also worried that the new penalty provisions in the Bill are too harsh," he said.

East Arnhem Regional Council member David Rumba Rumba expressed his concerns that the proposed Bill didn't properly recognise the importance of traditional Yolngu law for ceremonies and burials.

"We need to listen to the land. The land gives us our law and our traditional owners and Djungayi are responsible for making sure we do it the right way. If we don't follow the law we can all get in trouble," said Mr Rumba Rumba.

Speaking at Nhulunbuy, NLC Chairperson Samuel Bush-Blanasi said: “The NLC is preparing a submission to the Social Policy Scrutiny Committee and will carefully examine the role of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act and its application on Land Trust Land in the Burial & Cremation Bill”.

“It is of critical importance to our Members that Aboriginal Law and practices are not diminished by bureaucracy and government,” said Mr Bush-Blanasi.

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