

GOVERNMENTS, AFL MUST SHOW RESPECT TO OUR VETERANS AND RETHINK IMPACT ON CENOTAPH

VICTORIANS WOULD NEVER PROPOSE A STADIUM CLOSE TO THEIR SHRINE, WRITES MARK REDMOND

The chief executive and board of Reconciliation Tasmania wish to make public our support for RSL Tasmania's opposition to the proposed Macquarie Point AFL stadium.

The 49 sub-branches of RSL Tasmania that have unanimously opposed the stadium proposal have rightly highlighted the sacred cultural significance of the Hobart Cenotaph site to all Tasmanians. We firmly believe that this should be respected.

The following extract from the RSL Tasmania letter to Premier Jeremy Rockliff about the proposal indicates the detrimental impact a large stadium would have on the original intentions of the Cenotaph site: "We believe that the Tasmanians that erected this obelisk as an outpouring of unmeasurable grief after their loved ones made the ultimate sacrifice would stand beside us shoulder to shoulder."

Reconciliation Tasmania also agrees with RSL Tasmania that our state deserves its own AFL team and we do not object to the construction of a new stadium.

But we do not believe that Macquarie Point is the right location, especially given the impact it will have on the Cenotaph precinct.

At Reconciliation Tasmania, we stand shoulder to shoulder with our veterans in their requests to be heard about concerns that a stadium would diminish their most sacred of sites.

We also support the calls from Aboriginal people and the broader community for a truth and reconciliation park to be developed at Macquarie Point.

Plans for the redevelopment of Macquarie Point, from the earliest days, have emphasised a focus on reconciliation with Palawa and Pakana peoples through the inclusion of a truth and reconciliation park.

These plans have, over time, been whittled away, to the point where any plans for such a park are now unclear.

We believe that given the proximity to the Cenotaph precinct and the current state government's commitment to reconciliation, any de-emphasising of a truth and reconciliation focus would be a greatly missed opportunity for all Tasmanians and a considerable setback for our reconciliation journey.

We urge the Tasmanian and federal governments, along with the AFL, to rethink Macquarie Point as a location for a large stadium. Respect must be shown to our veterans and those Tasmanians who made the ultimate sacrifice in the defence of our nation. Reconciliation focuses on truth-telling and listening, and we believe that the concerns of RSL Tasmania need to be heard.

Concerns about the Macquarie Point proposal within different sections of our communities are loud enough to question whether the site has the sufficient social licence to proceed. These objections should be heard rather than dismissed, otherwise social licence cannot be claimed.

There are other options for a stadium location in Hobart, including Dowsing Point, near Elwick Racecourse. These should be considered to maintain the sacred pre-eminence of our Cenotaph with its intended uninterrupted views across the River Derwent and kunanyi/Mt Wellington.

We also firmly believe that, if a new stadium is a requirement of a Tasmanian AFL licence then fair access for all Tasmanians to that stadium is imperative.

Tasmania is different to other states in that its population is the most dispersed of any. More people live outside the capital than in it. In South Australia, for example, about 90 per cent of the state's population lives in Adelaide. The northern suburbs of Hobart, away from the congested CBD, are a fairer location for all Tasmanians.

We should not forget that the push for a Macquarie Point stadium has come through AFL executives and politicians, rather than urban planners.

The AFL and Victorian government would never propose a stadium in such close proximity to Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance.

Mark Redmond is chief executive of Reconciliation Tasmania.