



Press release

Natural History Museum offers an alternative dispute resolution to the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC)

The Natural History Museum has today offered to mediate its dispute with the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC) in the hope that terms for returning the remains of 17 Tasmanian Aboriginal people may be agreed without continuing the legal proceedings initiated by the community group.

The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre initiated legal action earlier this month to contest the Museum's November decision - based on advice from its independent Human Remains Advisory Panel and DCMS guidelines - to return permanently the remains following a period of data collection.

Dr Michael Dixon, Director of the Natural History Museum, comments: 'This is an enormously complicated issue. We have strived throughout to balance two very different opinions of what is the right thing to do - on the one hand returning the remains to the country of origin; on the other using this invaluable and unique resource for scientific research. We are confident that we have acted with integrity and transparency throughout and at all stages we have recognised the importance of the cultural and religious beliefs of Tasmanian aboriginals. This is precisely why our Trustees decided to return these remains.

However, the Museum's founding principle is the generation of knowledge to promote the discovery and understanding of the natural world for the benefit of humanity. For this reason we have stood by our decision to return the remains following completion of data collection. The remains represent a human population from a time when Tasmania was isolated from the rest of the world and this scientific information gathered from them could enable future generations to understand more about how their ancestors lived, where they came from and ultimately provide a fascinating chapter in the story of what it means to be human'.

Ends

Notes for editors

- The Museum has for a number of years sought powers to remove remains from its collection in response to claims - action which was legally barred until late 2005. Reflecting the complexity of this task, the Museum established an independent process which uses an independent advisory panel and follows the government's guidelines on this issue.
- In November 2006, following the advice of the independent advisory panel, the Natural History Museum Board of Trustees decided to return the remains of 17 Tasmanian Aboriginal people to an appropriate custodian nominated by the Australian Government., following a short period of data collection to be completed by 31 March 2007.
- Information on the Tasmanian remains being returned can be found at: http://www.nhm.ac.uk/about-us/news/2006/november/news_10019.html
- The Natural History Museum holds a collection of 19,950 human remains dating back to pre-historic times. The collection originates in all parts of the world, with the majority coming from the UK. This internationally important collection is used in the study of human evolution.
- Strict policies guide the care and management of the collections, information provision and conditions for access.

For further information or to interview a Museum spokesperson please contact:

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