

The Hon Madeleine Ogilvie MP
Minister for Innovation, Science, and the Digital Economy
Level 5, 4 Salamanca Place
Hobart TAS 7000

By email: madeleine.ogilvie@dpac.tas.gov.au

Dear Minister Ogilvie

I am writing with regard to the Tasmanian Government's decision to amend the *University of Tasmania (Protection of Land) Bill* to reduce the disposal restriction to the land below Churchill Ave and provide for the rezoning of some land above Churchill Ave to allow for a contribution to the development of a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) precinct on the Sandy Bay campus.

The University welcomes the Government's decision to take a pragmatic and balanced approach to accommodating the University's educational requirements while responding to community considerations. As you are aware, on 5 November 2024, I announced the University's plan for a future Hobart presence with four campus sites providing students with experiences built around the best the city has to offer, including the development of a STEM Campus at Sandy Bay. This plan would involve the complete retrofit of some existing buildings, the addition of new builds and the enhancement of the natural landscape of the campus. It will also provide opportunities for industry co-location, and increased school and community engagement.

This decision was the result of the University Council reflecting over an extended period of time on important matters including the educational needs of Tasmania, staff and student requirements and community feedback. This decision has been supported by the major new policy and funding directions for higher education set by the Federal Government, the State Government's legislation and stated desire to see STEM remain at Sandy Bay and the City of Hobart's planning directions.

Work is now well underway on the business case for the STEM precinct on Sandy Bay, informed by engagement with our College of Sciences and Engineering (CoSE) staff, students and relevant stakeholders and we expect to be able to share the final version with you in the first quarter of 2025. All indications are that the STEM facilities that Tasmania needs will cost in the order of \$500 million and support from all three levels of government will be critical, just as it was to our successful Northern Transformation project that has delivered the new campuses, enhanced learning offerings, and contemporary research facilities in Burnie and Launceston.

We were pleased to see the City of Hobart pass a motion to formally advocate for government funding to create a 'new world class STEM Hub' at Sandy Bay on 14 October 2024. This followed the motion in the Australian Parliament on 20 August 2024,

Office of the Vice-Chancellor

University of Tasmania
Private Bag 51
Hobart, TAS 7001
Australia

T +61 3 6226 2003
E Vice.Chancellor@utas.edu.au

CRICOS Provider Code 00586B | ARBN 055 647 848 ABN 30 764 374 782

utas.edu.au

moved by Tasmanian Senators from across the political spectrum. This motion resolved that there is an urgent need for the Australian Government to work with the Tasmanian Government to develop measures to address the STEM educational crisis in Tasmania, including the development of a new STEM precinct plan for the University of Tasmania with opportunities for community, industry and other education providers to be welcomed into the precinct.

We are now looking to the Tasmanian Parliament to join the push for these urgently needed new STEM facilities. This is a pressing issue for our entire community. Unless we get started in the next 12 to 18 months, Tasmania won't have new STEM facilities until well into the 2030's, putting us decades behind other states. As you know, that really matters when so many new jobs and the competitiveness of our existing industries are dependent on science and technology.

Given the absence of a dedicated infrastructure fund for higher education and the financial constraints of both the State of Tasmania and the University of Tasmania, as we have detailed before the Public Accounts Committee over recent months, we have recognised that the bulk of the funding for the new STEM facilities will need to come from the Federal Government. We have further recognised that between the State and the University, we will need to find a way to make a financial contribution to the project to attract Federal Government support.

Accordingly, the University is prepared to enter a deed of undertaking in the form of a deed poll, a legally binding document, to commit to all proceeds from the development of the rezoned land above Churchill Ave being committed to the STEM precinct below Churchill Ave. The University legal team has drafted a deed poll and provided it to relevant Tasmanian Government agencies to commence negotiations. This draft commits the University to keep the funds arising from development above Churchill Ave quarantined and to only use those funds for the purposes of financing the STEM precinct below Churchill Ave.

The University would also be open to making commitments around affordable housing in the deed poll, given our long-standing commitment to ensuring any developments on University land include a range of price points to allow for key worker accommodation. Subject to discussions with Homes Tasmania and other potential partners, there may be opportunities to include social housing and supported living for elderly Tasmanians as well. We look forward to further conversations with relevant Tasmanian Government agencies on this topic. Once negotiations are concluded and University Council has endorsed the deed poll, I propose that the final deed poll be made public in line with our institutional commitment to transparency and accountability.

In addition, we have commenced discussions with the Aboriginal Land Council Tasmania (ALCT) about a hand back of the bushland above the parcels identified for rezoning in the legislation, which has always been intended for protection given its environmental values. We are committed to working with the ALCT towards a Memorandum of

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Understanding to govern the work required to facilitate this handback, including consideration of the mechanisms for the land return, a thorough community engagement process and opportunities for the University to enhance its teaching, learning and research offerings through a land return. We will also need to undertake surveying to confirm the boundaries of the land to be handed back, noting that the Olinda Grove soccer grounds need to be available for ongoing community use.

I assure you of the University's commitment to working methodically through the plans for the development of new STEM facilities to ensure that all necessary existing facilities remain available for the use of our researchers until such time that better facilities become available. As we have said all along, we will retain many of the facilities on the Sandy Bay campus that cannot be moved, including but not limited to the student accommodation, sporting fields and a number of the key tenancies including CSIRO and the Tasmanian Herbarium.

Finally, it is worth noting here that any development on the entire existing Sandy Bay campus, including the proposed STEM Precinct below Churchill Ave and developments on the rezoned land above Churchill Ave, would be subject to regular planning approval processes through the Hobart City Council including standard public exhibition and community consultation.

Thank you for your important leadership on this complex issue. I look forward to continuing to work closely with the Tasmanian Government to bring the STEM precinct on Sandy Bay to life over coming years.

Yours sincerely



Professor Rufus Black
Vice-Chancellor

25 November 2024

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