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MEDIA RELEASE

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Kuarna Burial Site and Development Don't Mix

Independent MLC Ann Bressington has today expressed her dismay at the Government approving Torrens Island as a burial site for reclaimed indigenous ancestral remains despite the plans to further industrially develop Torrens Island.

Over the weekend, Aboriginal remains that had been held by the South Australian Museum were given a traditional burial on the northern end of Torrens Island by local Kurna elders.

As Ann has highlighted previously, the Government intends to industrially develop the northern end of Torrens Island, impacting on the significant environmental value of the pristine coastal areas, the Heritage listed former quarantine station and now the indigenous heritage of the burial site.

“With the pristine coastal environment and mangroves, Torrens Island is one of the few remaining refuges for marine wildlife and migratory bird species. Additionally, the Torrens Island Quarantine Station, which is heritage listed, is an important part of our history,” Ann Bressington said.

“We can now add the Kurna burial site to the list of Torrens Island’s significant values. If the Government needed another reason to abandon their plans to develop Torrens Island, surely the presence of indigenous ancestral remains would be it.

Ann questioned whether the development on the northern end of Torrens Island could now legally go ahead, given that the burial site is given significant protection under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988*.

“The Aboriginal Heritage Act was developed to protect Aboriginal sites and remains, and makes it an offence to interfere with or remove them. If the development on the northern end of Torrens Island is going to impact on the heritage value of either the burial site to its north or of the former quarantine station to the south, then the development would be in conflict with the state’s heritage laws.

“I say again, the Government must abandon its plans to further develop Torrens Island and instead take steps to conserve its significant environmental and heritage value, and now its Kurna heritage value.

Ann questioned whether the Government told the Kurna people that they planned to industrially develop Torrens Island before they decided where to reinter their ancestral remains.

“It is my understanding that many of the elders who attended the burial were not aware of the Government’s plans to develop Torrens Island, with some expressing dismay that the Government would nominate Torrens Island as a burial site if this was the case,” Ann Bressington said.

Given that this burial was partly coordinated by the Department of Environment and Heritage, Ann has questioned why this department can't facilitate an open day on Torrens Island for those who want to see the heritage listed former quarantine station, pay respect to the graves and experience one of the few remaining areas of pristine coastal environment in South Australia to the north.

"I get so many calls from people who would like to go out and see the history of Torrens Island but are unable to because public access is currently denied," Ann Bressington said.

"I have long suggested holding a Torrens Island open day but this seems too hard for the Government to organise. Given the number of people who visited Torrens Island to take part in the burial ceremony and the fact that this was organised by the Government, one now has to question this excuse."

For more information please contact Hon Ann Bressington MLC on (08) 8237 9596.