



**NORTHERN
LAND COUNCIL**
Our Land, Our Sea, Our Life

MEDIA RELEASE

Larrakia Elders call on federal government to protect Stokes Hill Sacred Site

1 December, 2025

Larrakia Elders Bill Risk and Helen Secretary are appealing to the federal Minister of the Environment and Water to safeguard the Stokes Hill sacred site against damage and desecration.

The Larrakia elders, represented by the Northern Land Council, have made an application on behalf of all Larrakia people under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984* (ATSIHP Act).

According to Larrakia Dreaming, the tawny frogmouth is a sentinel that guards the entrance to Stokes Hill Wharf – surveying the land and sea, keeping country and people safe.

The application follows on from the Northern Territory's decision in September this year to add developers to an existing 20-year-old Waterfront authority sacred sites certificate.

The changes to the *NT Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act* made earlier this year meant that new parties could be added to the certificate, despite there being no consultation and regard for concerns from Larrakia Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (AAPA) board members over the Stokes Hill sacred site.

Two businesses with interests in high-rise development, CEL Australia, previously SH Darwin, and Darwin Waterfront Corporation, are now named in the certificate.

The two Larrakia Elders are calling on the federal government to protect the sacred site under section 10 of the ATSIHP Act.

The proposed development blocks the line-of-site from Stokes Hill out to the harbour, and this obstruction puts Larrakia culture and tradition at risk.

The addition of new parties to the waterfront sacred sites certificate marks the first use of the NT Government's new powers after it amended the Sacred Sites Act earlier this year.

The use of these powers circumvents consultation and engagement with Traditional owners or AAPA, posing a major risk to sacred sites across the entire Northern Territory.

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Quote attributes to Northern Land Council Chair Matthew Ryan

“The NLC fully supports the Larrakia people in their bid to stop the desecration of their sacred sites at Stokes Hill Wharf.

“This sets a dangerous precedent that puts all sacred sites in the NT at risk.”

Quotes attributable to Larrakia Elder Helen Secretary

“The change to the Act is affecting our sites. We no longer have the protection we had.

“The Act has been protecting all our significant sacred sites, burial grounds and traditional areas for over 50 years – this is going to affect all Indigenous mob in the NT and their sacred sites.

“The NT government has shown disrespect to Traditional Owners, custodians and other Indigenous people.”

Quotes attributable to Larrakia Elder and NLC Council Member, Bill Risk OAM

“Our sacred site at Stokes Hill Wharf has particular responsibility in looking out for Larrakia people. A part of the responsibility is to watch and look out for approaching strangers, to look out for any danger, or any disturbance that is unnatural coming across the waters. And the lookout on the Sacred Site is very important because the site must maintain visual line-of-sight over all the harbor. The site has to care for our people.

“I am very upset. I worry about all our sites in the Darwin vicinity, in the harbor, in the rivers, Elizabeth River and across our country, which is the story of who we are and where we come from.

“I am asking the minister directly, to please step in and use his authority to help protect Stokes Hill Wharf and our connection to country.”

- **ENDS** -

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