

Westbury Region Against the Prison Inc (IA 12477)

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**Media Release**

**17 December 2020**

**State Government misleading as to status of the Marneys Hill reserve near Westbury**

On 24 June 2020 after announcing that the new site proposed for the Northern Regional Prison was to be on the informal nature conservation reserve (Marneys Hill) near Westbury, the Premier informed Parliament that the reserve had been acquired in error because “*it does not contain the values for which it was originally purchased*”.

The Premier based his statement solely on the assumption that the reserve did not in fact have an extensive forest community of Inland Black Peppermint, which he suggested was solely responsible for its acquisition and inclusion in the National Reserve System.

Subsequently, in a letter dated 16 September 2020 from Minister Roger Jaensch to Federal MP Brian Mitchell, Minister Jaensch repeated the assertion that the reserve was acquired by mistake because it did not host a community of Inland Black Peppermint [see enclosed].

These self-serving statements are incorrect and utterly misleading.

Information obtained by WRAP via RTI clearly shows that the reserve was acquired for a range of reasons. Inland Black Peppermint was no doubt an important one, but there were other compelling natural values which led to its acquisition. [see enclosed]

The Commonwealth Government has now appropriately affirmed this position: namely, that the reserve is, and will appropriately remain, part of the National Reserve System and that it warrants protection as such.

In a letter to Brian Mitchell MP dated 1 December 2020, Minister for the Environment Sussan Ley has confirmed that the Federal government provided funding to acquire the reserve to permanently protect it with a perpetual conservation covenant. [see enclosed]

“Minister Ley has essentially rebuffed the State Government’s shallow assertion that this reserve should not be part of the National Reserve System. It is clearly regarded as such by the Federal Government and the Tasmanian Government’s attempts to downplay the reserve’s natural values is nothing but misleading spin.

“Minister Ley has also called out the State government’s laxity in meeting its obligations to protect this reserve, noting that the reserve is still awaiting the protection under perpetual covenant it deserves. This is more than 20 years after its acquisition,” says Linda Poulton, spokesperson for WRAP.

The Federal Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment is currently awaiting advice from the State government as to how it intends to protect the environmental values of the reserve.

“Given that the Department of Justice’s environmental consultant Mark Wapstra has recently ceased to act, Minister Ley might be waiting for that advice for some time.

In the meantime, it seems patently absurd that the State government continues to push ahead with this site, when its own contractual obligations with the Federal government state that “*activities which cause major damage to nature conservation values should be excluded from CAR reserves*”.

Surely it’s time for the Department of Justice to back away from this reserve and give peace of mind back to the people of Westbury and Birralee before Christmas.

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