

ABORIGINAL CULTURAL HERITAGE ACT — REPEAL

**457. Ms L. METTAM to the Premier:**

I refer to the Premier's decision today to overturn and repeal Labor's Aboriginal cultural heritage laws, which he admitted went too far and caused stress, confusion and division in the community. Was the Premier misleading the public when he stated in this place that these laws were fair and simple, and running smoothly?

**Mr R.H. COOK replied:**

That was my fervent hope. That is why I said that we had got it wrong. That is why I apologised. We do these things. This is what leadership is about: it is about acknowledging when you get it wrong and saying that out loud, listening to the arguments and then making decisions and taking action. That is what we have done in this case. It is a very important, tough step to take. Obviously, it is an important one for the Western Australian community as well. We want people to work together around preserving our ancient sacred sites, and we want to have a framework that encourages that. That is why we believe that we have acted in the best way possible to continue to build consensus around that approach. I have not met a single person in the community who has said that they want to desecrate Aboriginal heritage sites. Obviously, there is anxiety about the way we go about that, so we have taken the important step today of correcting the measures and making sure that we put in place a plan and a program that people understand. We will continue to make sure that we have that conversation with the people of Western Australia and assist people to understand their obligations under the act—the same obligations that they have had since 1972 and will continue to have. People have worked with these laws for a long time, so we expect them to now move forward with certainty as they will understand their obligations. They can also be confident in the fact that they can reach out to the department and get instructions or assistance about how to do that. One way in which they will be able to do that is that the government will take a more proactive role in understanding where Aboriginal cultural heritage sites are and produce a body of work, which will assist the community to not only protect but also celebrate these sites. This is an important next step. It is one that we have taken after careful consideration and listening to the people of Western Australia.