



**Open letter to Hon Dominic Perrottet, Premier, Hon Kevin Anderson, Minister for Lands and Water, Hon Natasha Maclaren-Jones, Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services and Hon Anthony Roberts, Minister for Planning.**

Dear Premier and Ministers

We call on the NSW Government to withdraw its planning proposal to rezone Peat Island for tourism purposes.

For the disability community, the focus is on the importance of recognising the experiences of people with disability who were institutionalised at Peat Island. We also emphasise the significance of Peat Island to First Nations people whose connection to the land goes back over many thousands of years.

From 1911-2010, Peat Island operated as an institution for people with disability. Peat Island residents did not have choice in their living arrangements and were not allowed to achieve their potential. They were segregated from society on the basis of their disability, had little privacy or comfort in their living arrangements, were denied the standard of healthcare and education available in the broader community, and were subject to abuse.

There has never been a government apology or offer of compensation for this incarceration and abuse and people with disability continue to live with that history. At the same time, people who lived on Peat Island demonstrated resilience and survival, built communities within their circumstances, and formed lasting friendships. For the people with disability who lived at Peat Island, and for many it was almost the entirety of their lives, this site was their 'home'.

Peat Island provides a place where the public could learn about, and reckon with, disability institutionalisation. The formal recognition of this site as a community space would provide an opportunity to learn and celebrate the resilience shown by the people who lived there. People with disability and their families could remember experiences of institutionalisation and the site could be a place for communal remembrance.

If Peat Island is rezoned for tourism, it will be able to be used for holiday accommodation, corporate functions and weddings. This proposal is insensitive to the depth and complexity of the experience of people with disability at Peat Island over 99 years.

If Peat Island is redeveloped, its disability history will be erased and the message will again be that those who lived that history do not matter.

We call on the NSW Government to immediately withdraw its rezoning proposal and enter into a process of co-design with the disability community, the connected First Nations community and other representatives of the local community about an appropriate future use of Peat Island. This includes the possible option of its use as a site of conscience, where people could go to learn and reckon with Peat Island's past and celebrate the resilience and activism of people with disability.

Yours sincerely

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Chair, Council for Intellectual Disability

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Retired Family Law Courts Registrar Newcastle, and brother of Michael, former resident of Peat & Milson Island who died in the care of the department aged 13

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Peat Island family member and CEO Deafness Forum of Australia

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