

CRAGO UPDATE

from the AGM, 28th August 2015

as described by Richard Jaworski, and reproduced from email correspondence with Mark Maloney at Crown Lands.

The renewal of the lease of the land occupied by Crago Observatory was under negotiation from 2011, with the lease expiring in March 2014. The offer of a new lease was made by a department employee but, before the Society took up the offer, that employee resigned his position. It was discovered subsequently that the offer was never properly authorised. In the intervening period (early 2014), the site has become the subject of an Aboriginal Land Claim.

Since the March 2014 expiry of the lease, interim lease payments are being made monthly.

On 23rd August 2015, Mark wrote:

As discussed, Crown Land management is in a period of transition. New Leasing Guidelines are currently in preparation and will be forwarded to you once adopted by our Executive.

In the interim, I have further researched the Society's tenure and advise as follows:

1. The Aboriginal Land Claim affecting the subject land will not impede the grant of a new tenure, as the land is lawfully used and occupied, and therefore not claimable;
2. Any previous offer of a new Lease will need to be reviewed against the Department's recently adopted Direct Negotiations Policy;
3. It would appear that the 2011 offer of a new tenure by a former officer was not authorised. I am meeting with senior management on Monday to discuss the circumstances of the case, and will advise further immediately thereafter;

4. The Society is a "good and complying tenant", to use the parlance applied by the Department. This will be taken into account when reviewing future tenure arrangements;
5. For now, nothing is required of the Society. Your occupation of Crown Land will continue on 'holdover' (the current Lease having expired) until an Executive decision has been made regarding the future management of the site.

Richard responded with a query regarding point (3) on 25th August, to which Mark replied:

I have looked again at the file documentation. While still not convinced that a valid Executive approval has been given to the offer of a new Lease, I recognise the need for procedural fairness, and have asked Stephen Cook to prepare a short Brief recommending that the Deputy Director General ratify the 2011/12 "approval", so that a valuation instruction can be issued and a new Lease drafted.

Please rest assured that I am not trying to add red tape where none seems necessary, but that this is one of several "legacy" cases that need to be brought within the realm of current operational policy and practice for reasons of probity and transparency.

I'll be in touch again within a matter of weeks, hopefully for the purpose of confirming approval to proceed with a new Lease.

Please note that any new Lease is unlikely to take effect until the current Aboriginal Land Claim has been determined by the Minister and expiry of the subsequent 4-month period for appeal of the Minister's refusal of the Claim.

Richard will keep us posted!



SOCIETY AWARDS 2015

In the absence of any nominations by members of persons deserving special recognition, the committee decided not to present any awards this year, as there are so many members who volunteer their time to help the society in its many activities, it is impossible to single anyone out.

However, Anwasha Sahu won the Editor's Award for her continuing contributions to Universe, despite the pressures of schoolwork and exams. Anwasha's student membership has been extended by one year.

The President's Award was given to Lesa Moore for helping to make the President's life easier (and a nice drop it was!).

