



HON CHRISTOPHER PYNE MP

Federal Member for Sturt

Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training
Manager of Opposition Business, House of Representatives

17 October 2011

The Private Secretary to
His Royal Highness The Duke of Cambridge, KG
Clarence House
LONDON SW1A 1BA

Dear Sir,

I write regarding the offer that His Royal Highness The Duke of Cambridge made when he visited Australia last year that he would assist in the repatriation of the skull of Pemulwuy, an Aboriginal warrior.

Pemulwuy was an Aboriginal leader who fought against early British settlers around Sydney and Parramatta. Pemulwuy was killed and decapitated in 1802 and his head was sent to England and thought to be in the possession of Sir Joseph Banks.

A petition to have the skull returned to Australia was presented to the Prince in April 2010 by a group of Aboriginal elders led by indigenous leader, Mr Mick Mundine. His Royal Highness suggested to the elders at the time that he would assist in the skull's return to Australia.

Today the skull is in the possession of the British Natural History Museum, but the precise location of the skull remains unknown. The Museum is in possession of hundreds of indigenous remains whose identities are not catalogued. The Museum has an agreement with the Australian Government to return indigenous remains and artefacts. We would expect that if Pemulwuy's remains were identified he would be returned.


The Human Resources Department of the Museum claims that they lack the resources to trace the location of the skull and that they have other priorities. I have been informed that the Head of the Human Remains Unit, Dr Margaret Clegg has said that it would be several years before they would begin to properly date and identify the indigenous collection from New South Wales.

Pemulwuy is a hero for modern day Indigenous Australians and a rare example of recorded Aboriginal resistance. The return of his remains would be an important symbolic recognition of Aboriginal culture and history. It is also an important step towards reconciliation with Indigenous Australians. I am quite eager to know whether His Royal Highness would be interested in helping to expedite the matter. Any support that His Royal Highness could provide would be of great assistance.

The Australian High Commission is assisting me in this matter. His Excellency John Dauth AO LVO has conveyed this letter to you, for example. There is also a team of Australians interested in this matter who have already met with Dr Clegg of the Museum. They are led by Mr Alexander Hartman for whom I can provide a contact should that be of interest to His Royal Highness.

I look forward to your response.

Yours faithfully



Hon Christopher Pyne MP
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