

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-11-11/tasmania-apologies-for-body-parts-kept-in-pathology-museum/105996256>

Tasmanian parliament to apologise for body parts kept in pathology museum

By [Meg Whitfield](#)

Tuesday 11 November 2025



An investigation was undertaken into 177 human specimens held in the collection of the R.A. Rodda Museum of Pathology. (Supplied: UTAS)

In short:

The Tasmanian government says it will formally apologise for the past practice of retaining body parts after autopsies without the knowledge or consent of family members.

In September, a coroner handed down findings from his investigation into 177 human specimens held in the collection of the R.A. Rodda Museum of Pathology at the University of Tasmania in Hobart.

What's next?

The Tasmanian government will work with affected families to develop "an appropriate form of parliamentary apology". A date for the apology has not yet been set.

The Tasmanian parliament will formally apologise to the families who had body parts from their loved ones retained by a pathology museum without consent.

In April last year, the state's coroners' office announced it was investigating whether specimens from coronial autopsies had been collected and held in a museum without families' awareness, between 1966 and 1991.

In September this year, Coroner Simon Cooper [handed down the findings from his investigation](#) into 177 human specimens held in the collection of the R.A. Rodda Museum of Pathology at the University of Tasmania in Hobart.



The R. A. Rodda Museum of Pathology is part of the University of Tasmania's medical school. (ABC News: Luke Bowden)

He found pathologists working in Tasmania during this period may have "actively sourced" body parts from coronial autopsies to give to a museum without approval from families, or the consent of the coroners who were responsible for the bodies when the specimens were taken.

In parliament on Tuesday, Attorney-General Guy Barnett confirmed the government intended "to develop, in consultation with those affected, an appropriate form of parliamentary apology".

He said all members of parliament would have the opportunity to contribute to this process.

Mr Barnett said further consultation would take place with the affected families.

A date for the apology has not yet been set.

If you or anyone you know needs help:

- [Lifeline](#) on 13 11 14
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander crisis support line [13YARN](#) on 13 92 76
- [Beyond Blue](#) on 1300 224 636
- [Headspace](#) on 1800 650 890
- [ReachOut](#) at au.reachout.com



The collection formed part of the R.A. Rodda Pathology Museum. (Supplied: UTAS)

Mr Barnett told parliament that steps had also been taken within relevant departments to investigate further.

"I want to acknowledge how traumatic and devastating for families, both the revelations that this has occurred but also the recent coronial processes, have been,"

Mr Barnett said.

"I can advise that following the release of the coroner's report, I've written to both the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and Tasmania Police to make them aware of this report and for their consideration of this matter."



Guy Barnett will work with the affected families to develop "an appropriate form of parliamentary apology". (ABC News: Maren Preuss)

Mr Barnett said the health department had also been instructed to "undertake further work to establish, as far as is possible, the identity of any employees within that department during the period of the 1950s through the early 1990s who may have been involved in the retention of remains without lawful authority or consent".

A previously announced review of the Coroners Act 1995 was also underway, which Mr Barnett said family members would be able to contribute to.

Practice ended 'comparatively recently'

The investigation into specimens taken without relevant consent began in 2016, after the museum contacted the coroners' office with concerns about three specimens it had in its collection.

In his coronial report, Coroner Cooper found it appeared "at this stage that now-dead forensic pathologist Dr Royal Cummings was the person who provided the large majority of coronial specimens to the museum", but that it appeared "his predecessors and successors also engaged in the practice".

He found pathologists may also have "actively sourced specimens from coronial autopsies to give to the museum, as well as providing specimens that has been originally retained for forensic purposes under the Coroners Act 1957".

"The retention of human remains without family or coronial approval, or even knowledge, is an historic practice out of keeping with and offensive to contemporary standards and values," he said.

"It is inconceivable to my mind that it would ever happen again, although the fact that the practice continued for so long as it did and ended only comparatively recently is also almost equally inconceivable."

Coroner Cooper did not make any recommendations.

Apology step towards recognition

Independent MLC Meg Webb has welcomed the commitment from Mr Barnett for a formal apology.

Ms Webb has been calling for a formal state apology since January.

She said while it would not "undo the grief, pain and trauma so many people have found themselves thrust back into", it was a "significant acknowledgement that this indignity should not have been inflicted on their loved ones, and they should not have found themselves grieving tragedies again".



Meg Webb says it is important family members are kept informed about the progress of the apology. (ABC News: Greg Szabo)

"For many, a formal apology may be too little too late,"

she said.

"But it is the least the government can do and I welcome the attorney-general's willingness to come onboard and to also consult on this important apology itself."