

University of Tasmania will now be able to sell off land from its Sandy Bay campus

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Universities

5h ago



The University of Tasmania will be able to sell off some of its Sandy Bay land. (ABC News: Ebony ten Broeke)

In short:

After a years-long push by the University of Tasmania to sell off sections of land at its Sandy Bay campus to reinvest in other projects, a bill to allow the sale has passed through state parliament.

University land above Churchill Avenue, part of its upper campus, will be sold to partially fund a proposed \$500 million STEM facility.

What's next?

The University of Tasmania says the passage of the legislation will help the university secure funding for the STEM project, and enable it to restart discussions with the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania to hand back bushland.

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A bill allowing the University of Tasmania (UTAS) to sell land at its Sandy Bay campus has passed through parliament.

The University of Tasmania (Protection of Land) Bill 2025 was yesterday supported by eight members of the upper house, the Legislative Council.

MLCs from both the Liberals and Labor were joined by independents Ruth Forrest, Rosemary Armitage and Tania Rattray in supporting the bill.

It passed a third reading of the bill on Thursday morning.

While the bill allows the sale of rezoned land on the university's "upper campus" above Churchill Avenue, permission would need to be sought for any land disposed from its lower campus.



UTAS's land boundary, and, shaded in a lighter colour, the land proposed to be rezoned to inner residential. (ABC News)

UTAS hopes the land sale — which it has valued at \$100 million — will partially fund the construction of a science, technology and mathematics development (STEM) at the campus, estimated to cost \$500 million.

The STEM facility would also require state or federal funding, which the university is yet to secure.

University of Tasmania pro-vice chancellor Professor Nicholas Farrelly welcomed the support for the bill.

"We now have a way to realise the value of some of our land and make a significant contribution to the critical STEM at Sandy Bay project," he said.

"The legislative certainty also means we can recommence discussions with the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania to hand back most of the bushland above Churchill Avenue."

He said the university would work towards a memorandum of understanding with the land council.

Opponent Mike Foster of Save UTAS Campus said the bill "continues the damage done to UTAS under the leadership of vice-chancellor Rufus Black".



The university's plan to move its Sandy Bay campus into central Hobart was opposed by 74 per cent of Hobart City Council area residents in a 2022 poll. (ABC News: Mitch Woolnough)

The group called on the university to "abandon its \$500 million pipe dream" and instead refurbish the current facilities at its Sandy Bay campus.

"By rezoning the upper campus land to inner residential, supposedly for housing, the UTAS bill kills all prospect of investment and improvement in the STEM education facilities there," Mr Foster said.

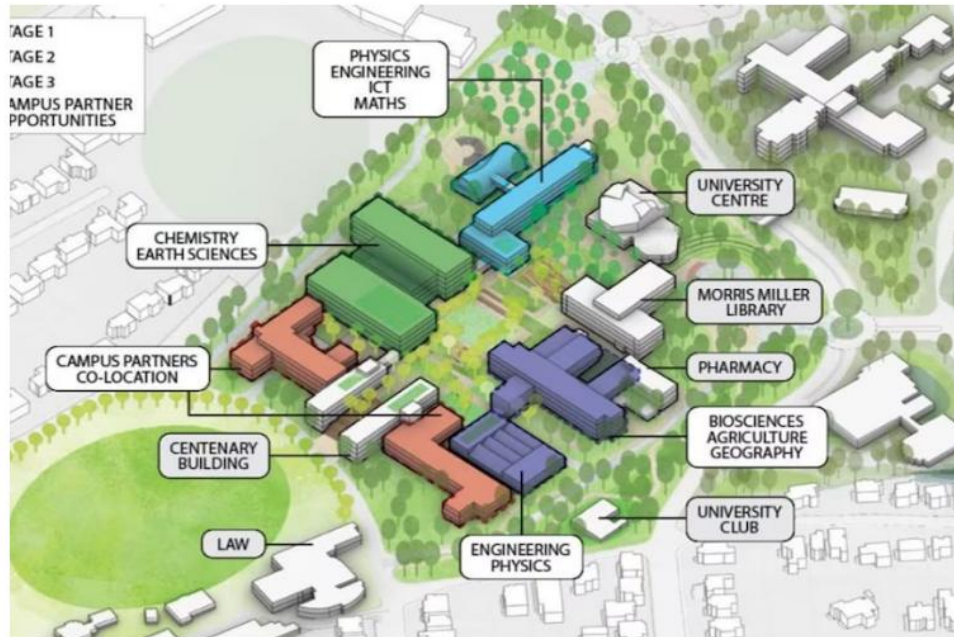
Bill 'secures the campus'

Tasmanian Education Minister Jo Palmer said the bill struck a compromise.

"It secures the campus for education and provides a funding pathway to deliver a vision for a new STEM precinct," she told parliament.

Ms Palmer referenced the university's Professor Eric Wapstra, who said the current campus was under-utilised.

"Simply upgrading the existing life sciences building does not deliver a new vision for STEM in Tasmania. It just sustains the existing one and that is not working with student numbers in decline and well below what the state needs," she said.



UTAS's proposal for STEM upgrades to its current Sandy Bay campus, which would be delivered in stages. (Supplied)

Ms Palmer said the bill created "a pathway for the value generated from that land to be reinvested into a world-class STEM precinct."

"With this bill, we move forward with certainty – securing an ongoing university presence at Sandy Bay, while enabling land not required for future needs, to contribute to the next chapter of higher education in this state," she said.

The minister also said increased enrolments on the north-west coast had proved the investment in facilities would pay off.

The land at the Sandy Bay campus was gifted to the university in 1951.

Some details 'worryingly silent'

Independent MLC Meg Webb, whose Nelson electorate takes in the Sandy Bay campus, moved several amendments to the bill with the aim of tightening the rules guiding UTAS.

She unsuccessfully moved amendments requiring UTAS to provide a detailed report on any land it plans to sell and one requiring parliament also to tick off on any leases of 30 years or longer.

Ms Webb has also raised concerns about how much of the campus area is protected by the bill.

Among the failed amendments, was one requiring parliament to tick off on any leases of 30 years or longer.

Ms Webb also raised concerns about how much of the land remained "undefined".

"The bill specifically defines the protected 14 per cent of land, and also the 28 per cent identified for rezoning, but is worryingly silent about the remaining undefined and unprotected 56 hectares between Churchill Avenue and Olinda Grove," she said.

A government spokesperson said the land was excluded from the bill because it "has been earmarked for Aboriginal land return by the university".

How 'going to university' can be a lonely online experience



Two students who went to UTAS 30 years apart share their radically different experiences as lectures go online and face-to-face contact takes a back seat in the post-pandemic world.



Meg Webb moved several amendments to the original bill. (ABC News: Kate Nickels)

UTAS offers 'compromise solution'

The legislation brings to an end the lengthy debate over the future of the Sandy Bay campus.

In 2021, the university [UTAS moves into Hobart CBD](#), citing the opportunity to grow, the declining state of aging facilities at Sandy Bay, and easier access for students.

The issue dominated the 2022 Hobart City Council election, and an elector poll held simultaneously showed that 74.4 per cent of residents in the Hobart council area opposed UTAS relocating to the city.

At the 2024 state election, the Liberals committed to introduce legislation to "keep the University of Tasmania in Sandy Bay".

Minister Madeleine Ogilvie said during the campaign the Liberals would amend the university's governing act so that it required "the explicit support of both houses of the parliament" to sell the Sandy Bay land.

After the release of the wording of the Liberal bill, it became clear it would also allow UTAS to sell some parts of the campus.

At the time, co-chair of Save UTAS Campus Angela Bird called the changes a "deception".

"It goes against what the community voted for at the last election," she told the ABC.

Emails obtained by the ABC show [UTAS lobbied the state government to change the policy](#).

Ms Palmer told the parliament yesterday that the changes were a "compromise solution" put forward by the university.

UTAS got what it wanted on land sales, but its problems run deeper



The University of Tasmania's reaction to a proposed restriction on its land sales was swift and effective, emails obtained under Right to Information show.