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NEWS 05

Why Liberal elder's appointment is back in spotlight 'Backflip' on job under fire



Former Liberal senator Stephen Parry has been appointed Tasmanian Heritage Council chair. Picture: Elise Kaine

Rob Inglis

Former Liberal senator Stephen Parry's appointment as chair of the Tasmanian Heritage Council has again been called into question after it emerged that ex-minister Madeleine Ogilvie had already selected a preferred candidate when the position was abruptly readvertised.

Ms Ogilvie, who served as the heritage minister until she resigned from Cabinet in May amid controversy over her legal fees, announced Mr Parry as the new chair of the statutory board in February this year.

It followed his unsuccessful tilt as a Liberal candidate in the Legislative Council seat of Montgomery and the 2025 state election.

The Tasmanian Heritage Council (THC) chair is paid \$35,000 per annum and is expected to commit about 10 hours a month to the role, which does not require heritage experience, according to the job description.

Documents released to independent Nelson MLC Meg Webb under Right to Information laws show the minister had previously nominated a preferred candidate during an earlier expression-of-interest process launched in January 2025.

Ms Webb said Ms Ogilvie needed to explain her "backflip", noting that "virtually one of [her] first actions following the election was to review a previous decision that just required formalisation".

"Tasmanians and the previous applicants who had participated in good faith deserve to know what caused the minister to change her mind within the space of barely three months," she said. "Would that apparent change of heart have occurred if there was not a failed Liberal candidate looking for a position in government?"

The newly published document trove includes a minute for Ms Ogilvie from May 12, 2025, sent by the secretary of the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE Tas), Jason Jacobi, in which he sought the minister's approval of a preferred nominee so that the appointment could be authorised.

Before an appointment package was considered by Cabinet, a snap state election was called in June, sending the government into caretaker mode and resulting in the EOI being paused.



Former minister Madeleine Ogilvie.

Tasmanians ... deserve to know what caused the minister to change her mind

Meg Webb
Independent MP

A week after the minority Rockliff Liberal government was officially returned to power on August 19, Mr Jacobi provided a further minute to Ms Ogilvie, seeking confirmation of her preference for the new THC chair.

Ms Ogilvie had already changed her mind once regarding which of the independent selection panel's short-listed candidates she preferred, ultimately deciding to select a nominee based on "her experience in relation to comparable regulatory contexts", according to Mr Jacobi's minute.

A note by the minister, written in pen, is visible on the document, simply saying: "Go back to market". It is not clear when Ms Ogilvie returned the amended minute to the department.

Another week passed before an email arrived in the inbox of Ms Ogilvie's chief-of-staff, Tristan Bick, on September 2. It was from Mr Parry. Attached was his CV and a short pitch for the THC chair job, saying he would "bring to any chair role ... energy, experience, financial acumen, legislative and governance comprehension, and proven corporate and community leadership".

The Mercury



Meg Webb

has been unable to establish how Mr Parry – who was contacted for comment – learned the position was going to be readvertised, given this didn't occur until October 4, a full month after his email to Ms Ogilvie's office.

There is no suggestion of any wrongdoing by Mr Parry or that he is unqualified for the job.

In a brief statement, Ms Ogilvie said she had determined the EOI should be "reopened" because the original recruitment effort was "outdated" due to the "delay forced by Labor's unnecessary election".

A government spokeswoman previously told the Mercury it was NRE Tas who recommended the vacancy be readvertised. "From that new EOI process, two candidates were put forward – including Mr Parry, who was selected," Ms Ogilvie said.

A spokeswoman for NRE Tas echoed Ms Ogilvie's comments, attributing the decision to the passage of time since the first round "due to the election and to attract a broader pool of candidates".

A former president of the Australian Senate, Mr Parry served in federal parliament from 2004-17. He emailed his CV to the department four days after the new EOI was launched and was one of four people short-listed by the panel.

Mr Parry previously said he had a "strong interest and passion for heritage in Tasmania" and that his application followed "normal, independent, and rigorous assessment and interview processes".