

To the Senate Community Affairs Committee

Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011

I wish to make a submission to the Committee to express my opposition to the proposed Stronger Futures legislation. The views expressed by individuals and organisations, both publicly and via the submissions, highlight a number of concerns about the proposed legislation.

I am particularly concerned about the importance of having a much wider consultation that includes a range of communities, including the more isolated and remote areas. No doubt there are different strengths, needs and situations in each community. In November 2011 the Northern Territory community Elders stated that the Intervention legislation was imposed upon them. We all understand that people need to be involved in the processes, planning and the decisions for their lives if change is really desired.

Key to any consultation is the deep listening and openness to implement plans and strategies that may not have been in the original thinking. Whilst the government looks to make many improvements it is essential that it is achieved in a side-by-side approach – *real conversations in a range of communities*.

It is critical that any decisions and/or legislation that are made offer realistic hope, support empowerment and not result in punitive approaches, be imposed or lead to further frustration and despair. The incidence of self-harm and suicide has already increased since the NT intervention commenced. (FaHCSIA, *Closing the Gap in the NT, Monitoring Report 2011*, Confirmed Personal Harm Incidents 109 in 2007-08 and 227 in 2010-11)

I ask that the legislation be withdrawn and that an alternative process and policy is developed in dialogue with Indigenous leaders. In working with one another it is essential that there is a genuine focus on deep listening and wider consultation; support for community empowerment; respect of culture, lands and languages; and the acknowledgement of current educational and health status in communities; the joint desire and insights for future planning which offers a life of fulfilment and hope for the future.

Yours sincerely

Carmel Heagerty rsm
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