



Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

20 November 2015

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
Submitted by email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

Re: SNAICC Submission to the Inquiry into the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Family Payments Structural Reform and Participation Measures) Bill 2015

As the national peak body representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, SNAICC is deeply concerned about the proposed changes to Family Tax Benefit payments within the *Social Services Legislation Amendment (Family Payments Structural Reform and Participation Measures) Bill 2015* (the Bill).

We appreciate the opportunity to participate in this inquiry and raise concerns about the impact of the proposed reform on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. We urge the Committee to reject the Bill on the basis that it will have a detrimental and punishing impact on our already struggling families.

The Department of Social Services has informed the Senate that, as a result of the reforms, a total of 136,000 single parents will have their payments reduced from \$3,000 to \$1,000 a year, while a further 76,000 families will have their benefits cut completely when their youngest child turns 13. We are particularly concerned about the disproportionate impact of these proposals on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. We believe this will occur because of the significantly different socio-economic profile and different cultural child rearing practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Factors that influence this disproportionate impact include:

- Indigenous people experience unemployment rates at over three times the level of non-Indigenous people (ABS, 2011), as the result of complex structural, political and economic factors that are strongly linked to intergenerational poverty, discrimination and disempowerment.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are three times as likely to live in single parent families compared to non-Indigenous children (29% compared with 9%).
- A high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are cared for by grandparents reflecting both cultural differences in child rearing practices and informal family and kin supports provided to address child safety concerns.
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population has a younger age distribution with more than one in three under the age of 15, resulting in an adult/child ratio of 1.8. Thus our families



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have more dependent children to care for while there are proportionately fewer adults with earning capacity.

Many of our people are already really struggling to meet the day-to-day needs of their families. These reductions will inconsistently further reduce the ability of many parents to care for their children at a time when Australian Government policy prioritises early intervention to strengthen families as the leading response to the ever deepening crisis of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Australia's child protection systems. The effect of further family breakdown will continue to drive negative outcomes for our children and contribute to their gross over-representation in the juvenile justice system.

SNAICC notes and supports the submission made to the Committee by the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) proposing an alternate reform agenda to align with objectives to reduce child poverty while ensuring adequate payments into the future and addressing workforce disincentives. SNAICC also believes that far greater efforts are required to create workforce participation opportunities, alongside training, workforce development and community development activities that will be far more effective in creating incentives for families to work than reforms that ultimately punish children.

A Bill of this nature that negatively impacts parents and carers on the lowest incomes, including single parents and grandparent carers, will undermine efforts across government to address disparities in developmental, educational and later life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Through the additional pressures placed on families, the reforms will contribute to violate the rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to grow up safe and cared for in their families, communities and cultures. Thus, SNAICC believes this Bill does not meet fundamental human rights standards and should be rejected on the basis that all families have the right and should be able to access the means to live with basic human dignity.

Yours sincerely,

Frank Hytten
CEO