

Submission:

To the Senate Committee on Stronger Futures Legislation,

I am deeply concerned about this legislation and the effects it will have over an extended period, on the lives and health, physical, mental and spiritual, of First Australians.

Yet mine is something of a tangential view, if not exactly dissenting, from the majority of submissions.

I think the Minister, Jenny Macklin, is doing a terrific job, so I want to support and 'strengthen her arm'. Yet clearly something is wrong. And all that the Committee ~ and Govt., have to go on are the responses of those on one side or the other; many opinions, and perhaps it would be true to say, some facts but not enough.

Is the issue a stark choice between imposing a govt. system in order to meet needs especially of the children, on the one hand, i.e. paternalism ~ and respecting rights and assisting self-determination and community initiatives on the other, with the inevitable outcome of failures along the way while learning takes place?

I've included part of an email which was my contribution to the discussion by the members of Reconciliation Banyule, after meeting with the Minister a few weeks ago.

Dear RBers!

I agree ~ rather not do anything than something negative and at the least deconstructive. When we discussed it after meeting the Minister, what we were suffering was cognitive dissonance over a set of 'facts' which just didn't agree. The first thing is to get this clarified and cleared up if possible.

Here's my take on it so far:

Jenny Macklin is not only the best we've got, but I'm pretty sure, the best we could get. Her heart is absolutely in this, and all her time and energies: she's working so damn hard to get this right and to improve the situation. Anyone else might have just stuck it in the Too-Hard basket; especially given the enormous opposition and controversy she's having to endure. She's very bright and savvy, and not I think as likely as most to succumb to delusion about it! That said, it must be incredibly hard, when you do indeed put your heart and soul into something, to acknowledge it has failed. (School attendance and retention rates especially). And to be in her frantically difficult position in that Ministry in AD/ACE 2011/12 in any government in the world. I don't know how she has the grit to get up in the morning and go on. It would be *so very counterproductive to derail this Minister. And the alternative is... ???* One of Tony Abbott's ministers, who may need to be unashamedly paternalistic.

The situation is incredibly complex; perhaps beyond any of us to fully grasp.

The Js' experience of the govt officials who walked away after getting a 'yes', not realising that they hadn't got agreement, seems to me to be a glimpse of the problems. The situation requires the utmost cultural sensitivity just for a start: Is there in fact, such a thing as a government programme or department or bureaucracy that is capable of such sensitivity?

You can try expecting your cat to behave like a dog, but expect away! (You could just go out and get a dog! What would getting a dog *be* in this context?)

Concerned Australians say there has not been proper consultation or in fact anything but bureaucratic commands. Jenny's reply was yes, that did happen in the past, but now there is proper consultation; it seems that some people are just not seeing that or moving on. She is emphatic that Aboriginal and TS Territorians want these measures in place because they are definitely helping. I don't think the Minister is deluded or attempting to delude about this: she has been present at too many consultations; I think she's just stating a fact.

- So perhaps:
1. Govt is constitutionally unable to really consult.
  2. What consult means is differently construed by each side.
  3. Those who disagree with the policies don't show up at Consultations.
  4. Those who do show up don't wish to upset things by disagreeing or displaying hostility.
  5. Or? Any suggestions?

You don't need to be Indigenous to *opt for polite agreement* for the sake of smooth relations and peace. *Or to prefer a positive version of the truth*; leaving out the negatives and disagreement, because the person or institution with which you'd have to disagree is admirable and to be encouraged even if not getting everything right...

But whatever the case, *this is the first thing to sort out* as you say. 'Consultations' have been held, agreement has been reached as far as the Govt. is concerned: why does the indigenous community (or is it only one part of it) still feel unconsulted? Is the grief that's so obvious when someone like Rosalie Kunoth Monks talks about the experience of the Intervention, a tragic and unintended consequence of **any government** attempt to fix things? (I think of the way that e.g. the Administrators move into the best of the housing intended for the programme recipients).

That ends the email to Reconciliationers.

My plea to the Honourable Members of the Committee is this: **Can you work out how to Get a Dog?**

Yours Sincerely,

Susan Shore (VP Reconciliation Banyule).