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Jeanette Radcliffe
Committee Secretary
PO Box 6100,
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

**Re: Inquiry into the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Amendment
(A Stronger Land Account) Bill 2014**

On behalf of Reconciliation Australia, I write to show our support for the reforms set out in the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Amendments (A Stronger Land Account) Bill 2014*, (the Bill).

Reconciliation Australia believes the measures outlined in the Bill will further protect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land Account (the Land Account), and ensure the Land Account is only used for land-related purposes, the way in which it was originally intended.

As the national organisation promoting reconciliation between the broader Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Reconciliation Australia seeks to help build an Australia that is reconciled, just, and equitable for all. Two important steps to achieving this vision are to ensure that Australia's national well-being is enhanced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strength and prosperity, and that the collective identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are recognised and respected.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have a special and strong connection to land. If we are to fully support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples strength and prosperity, and recognise their collective identities, it is imperative that strong land rights and the subsequent economic and social benefits of these are maintained and protected. The Bill, and the protection it affords the Land Account, is an important step in this process.

Since colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples connection to land has been disrupted, and when the Land Account was established, it was seen as an opportunity to help restore social and economic justice. It assisted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in re-establishing their relationship with the land. The Land Account provides a secure stream of income, as well as economic, environmental, social and cultural opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Protecting the function of the account for generations to come is an important step to build Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strength and prosperity into the future.

Given the recent Ernst and Young review of the Indigenous Land Corporation and Indigenous Business Australia initiated by the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion at the end of 2013, Reconciliation Australia believes it is imperative to ensure the Land Account continues to be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-controlled and protected from outside interests. The review of the Indigenous Land Corporation and Indigenous Business Australia highlighted that the Land Account should be protected from any changes to the two organisations, so its central purpose can be maintained: to acquire and manage land for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Enacting the Stronger Land Account Bill would be a positive step in this direction.

We believe that enacting the Stronger Land Account Bill is important to Australia's reconciliation journey. The Bill recognises the special relationship Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have with land, and protects this important Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander economic asset. The Bill also contains a strong focus on ensuring the Indigenous Land Corporation strives for the highest standards of good governance, transparency, financial accountability and ethical procurement. Strong and independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations should be supported, as they are imperative if Australia is to become a just, reconciled, and equitable nation. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must have control over their economic resources, and the opportunity to be involved in any future decisions about the future of the Land Account, which is supported by the Bill.

We ask the Standing Committee on Community Affairs to give much weight to the submission by the Indigenous Land Corporation, which Reconciliation Australia supports. This includes support for the suggested amendment to Clause 10 of the Stronger Land Account Bill, which would require consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the event any legislative change is proposed that deals with the purpose of the Land Account. The Indigenous Land Corporation recognises the advantages the Bill offers not only for the protection of the Land Account, but also for the Indigenous Land Corporation's structure and internal governance. Reconciliation Australia consistently advocates for the importance of strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance, and the Stronger Land Account Bill offers the Government a significant opportunity to support independent governance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bodies.

I urge all Senators and members of Parliament to support the Stronger Land Account Bill, and to seize this opportunity to further reconciliation in Australia.

Kind regards

Simon Gordon
Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Reconciliation Australia