

Cammi Marshall

30/1/12

Subject: Objection to the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011

Dear Committee Members,

I was with great sadness that I read of the extension of the NT Intervention in the proposed Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011. As a young Aboriginal woman who has been separated from her culture, I fear the same outcome for the young people of the Northern Territory. I ask that the Social Security Legislation Amendment Bill 2011, the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011, and the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) 2011 be withdrawn. I support the call by community leaders and Aboriginal elders for a return of self-determination as is justified by international human rights laws.

The proposed legislation not only imposes discriminatory policies on people who are already under a lot of strain, it removes all forms of self-determination from the very capable Indigenous leadership. Whilst I acknowledge that there are many problems amongst the Indigenous population of the Northern Territory, such as education levels and poor health, I have serious concerns about the methods proposed to combat these.

Working in the development sector, and with knowledge of the theories of development, I challenge the committee members to acknowledge that such top-down approaches which ignore the rights and desires of the target population will neither be effective nor sustainable. In fact, much of the proposed policies are contradictory to proven benefits. The Hub Town model, which relocates the people from their homelands through the removal of vital services, and forces them into urban locations, drastically severs the sacred ties to the land which are at the core of Aboriginal culture. Furthermore, despite Stronger Futures aiming to increase health levels, moving Indigenous peoples off homelands and into towns results in higher rates of alcoholism, drug dependency and mental health problems.

Despite both Indigenous leaders and political leaders desiring increased education levels, I believe that the Stronger Futures Bill goes about this in an extremely un-informed manner. Either that, or they have simply ignored the facts about education amongst Indigenous populations. The return of bi-lingual teaching in schools is proven to increase participation rates and would result in more young Aboriginals completing high school. Moreover, linking social security benefits to school attendance levels is a seriously dangerous policy. It does not allow for exceptions in the case of disabilities, behavioural problems, poor teaching or illness. Aboriginal parents do wish for their children to be educated, but is naïve to think that all children will attend school every single day. This does not encourage education, rather, it creates a negative link between education and stability. As any well-trained teacher would point out, children learn much more from positive reinforcement as compared to punishment.

As pointed out in numerous cases worldwide, cooperation and participation is the key to solving issues such as this. Intervention and the ignoring community solutions does more harm than good, and will be a step away from a just and inclusive society. There are plenty of capable, willing,

intelligent leaders amongst the Aboriginal community and I ask the government to actually consult them honestly, not simply inform and dictate.

Furthermore I would like to point out my opposition to the use of such issues by politicians for the benefit of their careers and the success of their party. I condemn the trivial manner in which such serious issues are discussed in the media, with focus being turned from the resolution of Indigenous problems to a ploy to buy votes and decry opposing political parties.

By far, my biggest concern with the proposed legislation is that on a whole, it goes against the advice of the Australian Human Rights Commission, the recommendations of the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner (Navi Pillay), the concern of Amnesty International, the voices of the Aboriginal elders and Aboriginal people. If you don't believe this to be true, please watch the honest documentary 'Our Generation' – a courageous insight into the hurt and betrayal felt by the Aboriginal people. I believe that if the Racial Discrimination Act had to be suspended in order to enforce the NT Intervention, and that Stronger Futures is basically an extension of this, Australians need to rethink our "Fair and Free" slogan. How could we be fair and free if we break international human rights conventions for the sake of improving well-being? There are better ways. There are more honest ways. Just ask the Aboriginal people and you will find out they are more than second class citizens. They are capable, knowledgeable, passionate, creative and ready for change . But only if you allow them to decide how to do this will change be respectful, sustainable and effective. The Australian Indigenous population has one of the richest and oldest cultures in the world, and this legislation is in effect destroying this completely.

Everyone deserves the right to self-determination, participation, autonomy, open and honest dialogue and should expect their government to care and support them. The Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill is an oxymoron. There will be no stronger future for Aboriginal generations and as such, I sincerely hope that the country I love moves to abolish such plans.

Regards,

Cammi Marshall.