

The Committee Secretary,

1st February 2012

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs,
community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary, **re the Stronger Futures Bill and related legislation**

I am strongly against this Bill and all the related legislation for the following reasons.

1. The whole Northern Territory Intervention was misconceived, is against the Human Rights of Aboriginal People and has failed in all its stated objectives.
2. There have been very few prosecutions for child sexual abuse, there are not more children going to school, there are more suicides and there is an appalling rise in imprisonment rates, many for relatively trivial offences like possessing a can or six-pack of beer.

Throughout the world, evidence shows that policy is only successful with the consent of those affected, and is most effective when those involved actively participate in prioritising policy areas, and in the implementation and control of the policies.

In their Statement on Aboriginal Rights by leading Australians, March 2011, the following points are made:

Examples of the failure of policies include:

- *The delayed, incomplete and flawed reinstatement of the Racial Discrimination Act.*
- *The entrenchment of discrimination against Aborigines in the criminal law of the NT by failing to repeal s. 91 of the NTER Act which ensures that no customary law or cultural practice, excuses, justifies, authorises, requires or lessens the seriousness of any criminal behaviour with which the Crimes Act is concerned.*
- *The retention and widening of involuntary income management in order to give it a veneer of non discrimination.*
- *The failure to provide proper housing exemplified by the slow pace of doing so and the fact that of new houses built by Government under the SIHIP¹ programme to alleviate overcrowding, there is a failure to take into account the size or requirements of the average Aboriginal family*
- *The failure to provide full time education to Aboriginal children, which is a right of all Australian children. Examples include:*

The fact that the 46 Aboriginal Homeland Learning Centres for which the NT Department of Education and Training² is responsible have never been allocated full-time qualified teachers and are reliant on fly-in fly-out teachers, often for only one or two days per week.

The failure of NTER measures such as the policy of removal of welfare entitlements where there is unsatisfactory school attendance, in that recent figures from the NT Department of Education² show a steady fall in attendance at schools in very remote areas between 2006-7 and 2009-10.

- *Maintaining the intervention despite evidence such as:*

The Health Impact Assessment³ launched in March 2010, which found that the Intervention could potentially lead to profound long-term damage to overall health and cultural integrity.

The 2010 Enquiry into NT Child Protection⁴ which links health problems to community disadvantage and poverty associated with overcrowding, unsafe and stressful environments, poor community infrastructure, poor nutrition and limited health care, all of which were supposed to have been addressed by the intervention.

I have personally listened to and discussed these issues with people from Town Camps and from large, medium and small communities. They have all agreed that Aboriginal people want, and are entitled to, the option to remain on country and to continue their cultural practices. They also want to negotiate on equal terms about government decision making and not to be treated as incompetent children by policy makers and bureaucrats.

I could write pages on this but there is little point. The reports and the evidence show that the NT Intervention must be dismantled and a new start must be made.

- Aboriginal rights to their land, their country, their culture must be respected.
- They should not be forced to live in the 18 Hubs just because the government finds it administratively more convenient. Evidence shows that these forced gatherings of people from different clan groups, outside their country, are not conducive to cultural, spiritual, mental or physical well-being.
- Aboriginal children in the NT are entitled to education which supports their Aboriginal language and culture and also develops standard English and an ability to function in both worlds. Positive suggestions from local communities about how to improve should be taken up immediately.
- People needing dialysis should have dialysis machines on country and not have to live away from family and support, sleeping rough in order to have the medical treatment needed to keep them alive.
- Income management does not improve the quality of life of Aboriginal people – I cannot imagine how anyone could seriously think it might. The voluntary agreed income management which Centre-link offered, at half the implementation cost, should be reinstated and made available. Children whose families don't encourage school attendance need support and encouragement, not further poverty and stigmatisation.
- Finally all legislation should be consistent with both the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 and the UN Declaration of the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

As an Australian citizen, I urge all Members of Parliament to rethink the NT Intervention and the proposed Strong Futures Bill and to sit down to do the proper consultation with Aboriginal people which can lead to a much more harmonious and fulfilled life for all of us.

Yours truly,

Monique Bond