

To the Senate Community Affairs Committee
Regarding the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011

Dr. Michael Mullerworth, Retired Surgeon, Convener of 'Current Issues in Indigenous Affairs' group, U3A Hawthorn

I wish to make a submission to the Committee to express my opposition to the proposed Stronger Futures legislation.

I concur with the concerns expressed by some community groups and national organisations, that the legislation does not reflect the views expressed by communities during the Stronger Futures consultations, and that it will further embed the disempowerment and discrimination that was begun under the Northern Territory Intervention.

I submit that the consultation process was rushed and flawed, confirmed by reading the "Stronger Futures Quality Assurance Report" commissioned by the Dept. of FaHCSIA. This Report was used to justify continuation of the same policies, but closer reading of it reveals many qualifications, such as: "...the document (Consultation Paper) was too large....", and ".....the large amount of contentwas not conducive to in-depth discussion". Also, "...the level of participation varied greatly....and appeared to be related to preparation".

I refer you to "Cooperation not Intervention" by ANTAR (Attachment 1) and "Stronger futures must begin with better listening" by Rachel Siewert (Attachment 2) which express these concerns more eloquently. I agree with their plea for the Government to reconsider the new legislation and to remove the punitive provisions. I believe they should be replaced with measures to truly engage with the people and to give them more responsibility while building their skills and capacities, particularly in governance.

In the Executive Summary of the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Report it is stated that: "they wanted governments to talk with them and they wanted to be listened to", and "...they wanted to take more responsibility for their lives and communities". I submit that the new legislation will not do anything to make this happen, though I agree with the need for long-term engagement to address Aboriginal disadvantage.

I ask that the legislation be withdrawn and that an alternative policy be developed, based on genuine consultation, community empowerment, the respect of Aboriginal culture, lands and languages, and the fundamental right of Aboriginal people to be able to control their own lives.

Thank you.
Michael Mullerworth