

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE STRONGER FUTURES LEGISLATION

(Social Security Legislation Amendment Bill 2011
Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory (Consequential &
Transitional Provisions) 2011
Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011)

To whom it may concern.

I am writing this as a submission to the Senate Community Affairs Committee's Inquiry into the Stronger Futures legislation.

I share my concerns of people living in prescribed areas who are affected by the NTER (Intervention). Over the past four years travelling to various prescribed areas in the NT comparing the remote communities I have numerously visited during my early childhood, to adulthood to where I am now at this stage of my life.

It's very hard to believe the NTER has done any good or that it has improved the lives and situation of Aboriginal people living in prescribed areas on the basis that there is no real evidence.

I have been involved with groups collecting evidence as well as working with NGOs and Aboriginal organisations to ensure Aboriginal people can voice their concerns regarding the NTER.

It clearly shows that during any senate committee inquiries in the past Aboriginal people have been ignored. Aboriginal people are confused and frustrated over who is responsible for what policies imposed upon Aboriginal people living in prescribed areas, whether it is the federal government or the Northern Territory government or the shire councils.

The billions of dollars which were allocated and spent over the past four years have shown no positive outcomes.

In regards to the Stronger Futures consultations that I have witnessed and was involved in, it was very disappointing and disturbing to hear how Aboriginal people living in prescribed areas were greatly ignored. Once again Aboriginal people have wasted their time and energy focussing on the wants and needs of each and every prescribed area.

The three bills that have been put forward to the House of Representatives and now put to the Senate Committee, just like the NTER legislation, many Aboriginal people living in prescribed areas do

not have a clue or understanding as to what the Stronger Futures legislation entails.

In the three bills there are still aspects of the NTER: that is why it is regarded as a second intervention. Even though the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 has been reinstated most parts of these new bills will be still affecting Aboriginal people in prescribed areas.

For what it's worth, Aboriginal people have always been against the NTER and they are also strongly opposed to the Stronger Futures policies.

The proposed laws are not in line with what people were saying at the *Stronger Futures* consultations. It is true that people voiced education as an important issue for their children and their future. But they did not agree that withholding more of people's social security entitlements was the way to tackle this matter. They asked for quality teachers and more Aboriginal teachers. They saw culture and language as important in their children's education. They asked to be listened to. They asked to be respected. They said they were tired of 'outsiders' telling them what to do. They spoke of successful community-initiated programmes that had been undermined by the NTER. They asked to run their own affairs.

People are weary of repeating themselves and not being listened to. Many people are giving up hope and turning to drink. The men have been demonised, many have no purpose in living now that CDEP (a valued form of work) has been taken away and they work for the 'dole' and are income managed.

The untold story is the ever-increasing incidents of attempted self-harm/ suicide that are occurring. The shocking incarceration figures will not dissipate with harsher alcohol laws but will drive more people to crime as they become more impoverished.

Loss of autonomy, resources and opportunities in communities is driving many people into the larger town centres. The overcrowding situation with housing has not improved. More and more Aboriginal children are being removed from families, another silent statistic. There is a deteriorating social situation in these larger towns, with crime on the increase.

There is a huge amount of money being wasted on the expansion of income management and the SEAM trials and the continuation of the intervention in areas such as retaining the very expensive government business managers and indigenous engagement officers, expensive service provision by outsiders, considerable reviews,

consultations, research, reports and so on. These funds would be better spent on preventative programmes, legitimate job creation, supporting community-based initiatives and evidence-based successful community programmes. This would increase feelings at the grass roots level of Aboriginal people being valued and respected and enable them to take responsibility in their communities and have control over their lives.

The government needs to respect Aboriginal people and work in genuine partnership. This does not mean flawed consultations to rubber stamp the government's agenda. Our people have the solutions to the issues affecting them but they need time, space and a legitimate community development process of talking together to work through these issues, with the support of the necessary resources.

On behalf of my people I call on the government to withdraw its *Stronger Futures* legislation and work in real partnership with key Aboriginal leaders from the Northern Territory and peak organisations such as the Australian Council for Social Service, the Australian Education Union, the Aboriginal Peak Organisations in the NT and all the organisations that are delivering services throughout the Northern Territory to the people on the ground, in order to pave a way forward for the future.

Barbara Rachel Shaw
Mt Nancy Town Camp
Alice Springs

1st February 2012.