

The Land Rights Act was first passed in 1976. It was in its day and is still a very significant piece of legislation. The Minister has said that the proposed reform is the most significant review of the Act since its inception. It should go without saying that any changes should only take place after the most careful consideration.

Under the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), no laws should pass without the 'free, prior and informed consent' of the people affected by the laws. The people most affected by the Bill are First Nations people of the Northern Territory. These people live in scattered communities all over the Territory. They are from different language groups. Wide consultation with all of them is essential.

It is my understanding that many of these communities are unaware of these proposed changes. They have not had the opportunity to give their input to what could be most significant changes.

The Australian public needs to be assured that the consultation process has integrity. It is my understanding that there has been consultation between the government and Land Councils however there is no transparency to that process.

Many indigenous people are not adequately represented by the Land Councils. This is especially true of traditional owners and yet their lives will be impacted by the Bill. They have not been consulted.

The Bill is long and complex. There is no need to rush these laws through Parliament when they could have a huge impact/far reaching effects on First Nations Peoples Rights.

What is the reason for the haste? Why cannot the consultation process take place in a transparent and timely manner? I urge that the Bill not be passed until there has been full and thorough consideration, with proper input from all affected peoples.

The Bill should also ensure that there will be an independent review of the workings of the new laws after each period of 3 years. That way the implementation can be monitored, and changes made as needed.