

January 31st, 2012

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

I am writing to the Committee to express my dismay and opposition to the planned actions of this Government towards the Stronger Smarter legislation.

I am appalled that anyone can believe that extending Intervention a further 10 years will be **for the betterment of Indigenous Australians**.

How can "STRONGER SMARTER FUTURES" legislation have a positive impact on Aboriginal lives, when after almost five years life is actually worse for too many families in remote Aboriginal Australia. In June 2007 when John Howard & Mal Brough made the decision to roll in the army and introduce the **Northern Territory Emergency Response** I don't think I have ever felt more ashamed of an Australian Government and more ashamed of a nation to allow this action to take place. The Government of today continues to trample on the rights of Aboriginal people in the remote communities of the NT.

Through the Intervention human rights were yet again stripped away, governments actions justified because they had to "save the children", John Howard and Mal Brough lied and they continued to spin the lie across the country. If these men were SO concerned with the plight of Aboriginal children then WHY didn't they take action 10 years earlier when they had a chance to make a positive impact on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

Truth is NO government in our history has really ever truly valued the first peoples of this country, never really valued the rich culture and the fact that Australia is home to the oldest living culture in the world. For over 200 years government has continued to tell Aboriginal people how they should live, there has never been true and equal consultation, instead of Treaty there was theft of land and culture. Our history shows growth of the **invisibility of Aboriginal Australia** and how still in 2012, little thought is given to what Aboriginal people want for themselves and the future for their kids. This is the **SHAME** we all carry as a nation.

Governments continue to trample over Aboriginal people, they won't negotiate with the leaders across the country, they continue to form policies that are heavy handed and controlling, that strip away all dignity and independence. We are no better than those who came to this country 200 odd years ago, **have we learned nothing of our past?** I don't feel we have because Aboriginal people continue to be treated as second class citizens.

The heart of communities continues to be ripped out. These are communities and peoples that are strong and rich in culture, have strong connections to their land, yet forced to live under the rulings of a government that obviously doesn't value or respect Aboriginal people, their culture, their languages nor their rights to self governance.

One example of these actions that is so very wrong and plainly ridiculous is the quarantining of income to lift school attendance! Will this really bring about good outcomes for anyone.

Access to basic services in communities are already poor, provision of good quality food can be scant at best from the local community stores....if there is a store in the community, so I cannot believe by taking away monies from a family HOW is this going to help to feed already hungry children? How is

this going to assist already stressed and overloaded families? Across the globe these sorts of actions have NEVER been proven to work, there is no conclusive evidence! WHY is quarantining of income continued – it takes away your dignity, it takes away your rights to make your own choices, it brings SHAME to families forcing people to live under such conditions. It certainly isn't a way to encourage children to go to school! Instead – ask WHY under the so called intervention has attendance rates dropped!

Is the school and education on offer serving the community and the needs of the children. I know there are successful programs operating in communities where children ARE learning – these are the schools where culture and language are valued, parents have a say in their child's education and school is inclusive, school is one part of a whole community....and in these schools Aboriginal families, their language and their culture are respected and valued....this is two way learning at its best.

Don't keep blaming the families for the low school attendance. Let's be honest - would you send your child to a school that treated your culture and family with such disdain and disrespect - would you send your child to a school that didn't really value the essence of your being and understand the deep connection to your land? **I don't think you would.**

I am angry that a Labour Government continues to follow the appalling actions of the Howard Government and even more alarmed that the choice now is to extend these actions for another 10 YEARS. You justify your actions under a new softer title of "STRONGER FUTURES" you say that you have consulted and that you are acting on behalf of the voices of those you have consulted with. Truth is you have consulted with a handful who would agree with your policies....you haven't consulted with all leaders, you cannot continue to push all communities into the one box – if you think this is right then you have learnt nothing of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal land. If the intervention continues under these same existing policies then you will see a further rise in ill health, youth suicides, a further drop in school attendance, a greater depth of despair and sense of hopelessness....this is what the intervention is bringing to communities – I can say this because I have seen these things happen in the communities I have got to know in the past eight years. Life has become harder than ever before.

Please.....Stop the Intervention, enough is enough, the past can't be changed but it is not too late to take a new path.

Show true leadership in recognising what isn't working - listen to Aboriginal people and work together on a new policy that will empower Aboriginal people. A new way will only strengthen the future of this nation. Value all our people and especially the first Australians.

Sincerely

Michelle Flaskas