

Submission re Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011 and related Bills:
To the Senate Community Affairs Committee

I am writing this submission to express my opposition to the proposed Stronger Futures legislation and my deep concern regarding the impact of the NT 'Intervention' on many Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. Particularly concerning is the extreme negative stereo-typing that occurred and continues, paired with such a loss of autonomy and voice regarding their own affairs that disempowerment and raised levels of self harm and suicides were inevitable. They will surely continue with the proposed extension of the legislation.

I believe that the legislation is racist and that the abuses of the human rights of Aboriginal people under the legislation and the subsequent harm caused is criminal. I am deeply ashamed as a fellow Australian that this is happening in our country.

To extend the legislation for a further 10 years and to continue the top down 'blanket solution' approach to complex social problems and disadvantage is offensive and condemns people to further shame, stigma and suffering. The proposed legislation should be withdrawn. There has been a major failure to acknowledge the strengths and knowledge within the majority of communities and to work with them on solutions.

The proposed legislation focuses on punitive measures such as cuts to family support payments when children fail to attend school. Not only have these approaches not been shown to work, they further stigmatise and punish families already living at poverty levels and create further hardship. Positive, supportive solutions that improve school attendance are known to communities and governments alike. I call on the government to fund those solutions rather than imposing expensive, punitive control measures that further undermine the dignity of people.

There are so many aspects of the current NT Intervention legislation, and the way it has been used to undermine the rights, including land rights of Aboriginal people in prescribed areas, and to undermine their control in how they live their lives, that are extremely damaging. We are all diminished by the damage that has been inflicted on the First Nations Peoples in the NT, and the failure of governments to listen to their voices, take seriously their concerns and work with them in partnerships.

The proposed legislation does not reflect the views expressed by communities during the Stronger Futures consultations and will further entrench the discrimination and disempowerment of Aboriginal people living under the NT Intervention.

The future of all Australians would be better served by withdrawing the proposed Stronger Futures legislation and the government working in real partnerships with key Aboriginal leaders in the Northern Territory, with respect and co-operation, alongside peak organisations that deliver services to the people. The fundamental right of Aboriginal people to control their own lives must be returned.

Sincerely,
Julie Bain