

Committee Secretary

1 February, 2012

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs

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*Dear Sir/Madam,*

Please repeal the existing NT legislation and withdraw the proposed Strong Futures legislation. The NT intervention has not worked. In February 2012 the results so far show loss of community control over their country, their schools, their stores with a subsequent loss of ownership and willingness to be involved with making things work well for everyone.

The proposed legislation will extend this negative intervention for a further 10 Years, without the consent of the Aboriginal communities involved and in spite of evidence of increasing hardship and disempowerment of Aboriginal people.

The NT intervention and Strong Futures legislation are basically punitive – they punish Aboriginal people for being poor and for committing the offences which come from poverty, lack of literacy and having English as a second or third language. Fines for not paying something on time, for not enrolling in elections, for not having a registered car are not paid and then accumulate until they generate a prison sentence, at great cost to the tax-payer and trauma to the prisoner's family.

- **It is time to sit down and negotiate properly with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory**
- to listen to and understand their desire to live on country and in their own cultural way
- to support their rights to genuine negotiations re mining on their lands, and just payment for it
- to listen to their suggestions as to what is needed to get better school attendance,
- to develop worthwhile employment where the people want to live, often on country,
- to help those addicted to alcohol and gambling.

I have proudly represented Australia in three Olympic Games and as a Rhodes Scholar in Oxford but I am increasingly finding it difficult to feel pride in Australia's treatment of her marginalised peoples – the First Peoples, the latest refugees and other poor. These people are trapped but continually demonstrate that they are our equals and deserve the same opportunities.

Sincerely yours,

Dr Graham Bond