



**The Hon Jenny Macklin MP
Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services
and Indigenous Affairs**

*Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600*

*Telephone: (02) 6277 7560
Facsimile: (02) 6273 4122*

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Mrs Julia Irwin MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mrs Irwin *Julia*

Thank you for your letter of 17 September 2008 in relation to a petition about giving Indigenous Australians a voice. I welcome the opportunity to respond to the petition.

The Australian Government is committed to establishing a national Indigenous representative body to give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a voice in national affairs and is seeking their views prior to making a decision on the form of the body. A public consultation process commenced in July 2008 which to date has included over 80 public meetings across Australia in every state and territory.

There has been a high level of positive and productive feedback at each consultation meeting and as part of the written submission process. Some of the key messages are that the representative body should:

- advocate human rights and social justice for Indigenous people;
- be credible with both Government and communities, with open and transparent operations and decision making;
- be independent from Government;
- be accessible to all Indigenous people;
- have fair and diverse membership, particularly equity in gender, inclusion of youth and representation from urban, regional and remote communities;
- be sustainable and have adequate and appropriate sources of funding; and
- have clearly articulated roles and functions.

Copies of submissions are available on my Department's website, and outcomes of each consultation meeting will shortly be available.

I will soon make available information on the next phase of consultation.

During the consultation process, Indigenous organisations and other formal advisory mechanisms will continue to be consulted to inform the Government's policy making.

Further information about the consultation process can be found on my Department's website at <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/indigenous/rebody.htm>.

Thank you again for writing.

Yours sincerely

JENNY MACKLIN MP