

Submission to the Senate Inquiry - 'Welfare Reform and Reinstatement of the Racial Discrimination Act'

As an Australian citizen, I have been concerned to hear various reports over the past two and a half years about the NT Intervention and the effects on Aboriginal people in the 73 prescribed communities. Many Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory report that every aspect of their life has been controlled under the Intervention. Of particular concern has been the continued suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) to allow various discriminating measures like blanket Income management to the 16,000 Aboriginal people originally under the Intervention. Understandably this suspension in particular, has brought national and international criticism to which the Government is responding by this current Bill. I urge Senators to ensure that the restoration of the Racial Discrimination Act is done in an authentic manner, genuinely respecting the human rights of Australian citizens.

I am surprised and concerned that the Federal Government seems to be responding to criticism of the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act by proposing to simply get around the RDA. This it hopes to achieve with this current Bill, partly by extending Income Quarantining to various disadvantaged non Aboriginal people from chosen 'disadvantaged areas' across the nation. It is also of grave concern that 'the Minister may, by legislative instrument determine that ' a specified state, Territory or area 'is a declared income management area'. Such a declaration and others within the Bill give a great deal of control to a Minister over the lives of the citizens, Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal, of our country. I urge that Senators ensure that such unchecked powers whether by a Minister or by bureaucrats, have no place in our democratic nation.

I understand further that one of the effects of the Bill will be that Aboriginal people already under Income Management will have no redress for at least a further 12 months. Of course there are likely to be many other similarly disadvantaged Aboriginal people besides non Aboriginal people living within the newly chosen 'areas of disadvantage', particularly but not only in the Northern Territory which I understand is the first designated such area. I urge Senators to resist this continuing erosion of the basic human rights and entitlements of Australian citizens proposed in the Bill; rather recognising that those citizens on Social Security Entitlements have the rights to the security that the name implies.

Under the Intervention Aboriginal people have been required to give up freehold title and special leases to obtain housing and other services. There is a provision in the current Bill which prevents the Federal Government from permitting mining on leased land. This, no doubt, is in answer to critical assertions since the Intervention began in 2007, that the purpose of the Intervention has been about accessing Aboriginal land for mining interests. This provision forbidding such, no doubt, will be carefully monitored.

I sincerely hope that the many negative aspects of the Bill will fail so that there be a genuine restoration of the Racial Discrimination Bill. Thank you for receiving my submission