

**From:** Martin Wyness [martinwy@bigpond.net.au]  
**To:** Committee, Indigenous Affairs (SEN)  
**Received:** By email

**Subject:** alternative to atsic

dear sir or madam, when setting up an alternative to atsic, it is perhaps worth considering a few points. my own personal contact with aboriginal groups throws up the same fundamental flaw again and again. this is that the white society that interfaces with organisations like atsic still insists on a paternalistic course of determining what is best for a people who they cannot understand due to cultural differences.

simple problems like, what sort of shelter do aboriginals require for themselves is a good example. aboriginal housing in the bush follows a fifties pattern in its layout and functionality. in practice, indigenous families often want to be able to accomodate extended family under the same roof, and cannot because of size and layout limitations.

price and durability are deeply reflected in this housing as it is often souless and unwelcoming as a shelter. not listening to the needs of these communities and forcing mainstream white planning constraints upon them, hoping they will adapt to white norms has not worked. aboriginals will in some circumstances not value australian housing and neither should they be expected to as they have their own ideas about how they should live.

all organisations from planning down to police and health care should focus on what they can do to assist aboriginal self determination, instead of the current trend of making them fit our template for society.

without a desire by white government to give aboriginal nations what they truly want, there can only be a repeat of the fiascos that have been aboriginal policies up to now. more money would be nice, but, without it being spent where the elders want it spending, nothing will change. the hard thing here will be agreeing to let money go to projects that we either do not understand or may perhaps simply disagree with. there will at times be issues that we will be tempted to interfere with, but once again, we will not be able to see the full cultural picture that is often behind what sometimes can appear to be bad leadership.

i remember being deep in the mozambique bush during the floods a few years ago as part of the relief operations. we had just delivered a hundred tons of maize to a village and were horrified when told that the chief then planned to sell it to his stricken people. an old man explained to me that they needed the chief to still have absolute, sometimes unfair power over them. that was their way, it was what they were comfortable with and it gave them all a sense of place. i left knowing that i would never understand, but also that i must always be careful to not judge when moving through cultures different to my own.

australia is blessed with having a wonderful and enduring indigenous culture in its midst, one that is inpenetrable to all but a few. it will be sad and to our detriment if we destroy that culture not through lack of concern and willingness to help, but rather through a reluctance to allow real self determination.

aboriginal well being is inextricably linked to our own. if these nations suffer, we have no choice but to be held back in our own moral growth and value as a nation.

yours sincerely,

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