



**The Students' association of the University of Adelaide University
Submission:**

Senate Select Committee on the Administration of Indigenous Affairs
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Bill 2004

The Students' Association of the University of Adelaide

The Students' Association of Adelaide University (SAUA) is the peak representative body for all students enrolled at the University of Adelaide. The University of Adelaide is comprised of four campuses – North Terrace, Roseworthy, Waite and Thebarton Campus and have over 16 000 enrolled students. The SAUA is an affiliate of the Adelaide University Union, as legislated in Section 21 of the University of Adelaide Act 1971.

The SAUA acknowledges the Kaurna people of the Adelaide Plains, the traditional owners of the land on which the SAUA is located.

The SAUA welcomes this opportunity to comment on the Federal Government's intention to close down ATSIC and the associated agency,

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS). We do this on behalf of our members, the students of Adelaide University. The SAUA condemns the Federal Government's move to abolish ATSIC and ATSIS.

The SAUA Mission Statement is as follows:

- The Student's Association of the University of Adelaide's (SAUA) primary objective is to provide accountable, strong, relevant, and transparent representation to its membership. The SAUA is the peak student representative body on campus, and is the primary advocate for students, to the University, Government and the wider community.
- The Student's Association recognises its opportunity, and obligation to highlight issues affecting students in the education sector, and people in the broader community. The SAUA will uphold the principles of equity and accessibility in the Education sector.
- The SAUA will lobby all relevant bodies and do all possible to ensure that students, young people, and people within the higher education sector are represented, and their views, convictions, and opinions are supported.

This statement directs the SAUA's day-to-day operations and as such this mission statement will provide the direction and foundation for the SAUA's submission.

The Students' Association of Adelaide University is comprised of a number of departments, who each offer unique and valuable services to the SAUA's members. In 2003, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Department was developed as a SAUA department and has since proved to be one of the most active and vital departments within the Association.

ATSIC and Education

The SAUA recognises and values the support provided to Indigenous students by ATSIC. The ATSIC website states that:

“It [ATSIC] provides a voice for the Indigenous “clients” of educational services by monitoring and reporting on the programs and policies of education providers. ATSIC facilitates partnerships with others involved in the design and delivery of education services and develops new ideas which it puts to these stakeholders for consideration.”

The abolition of ATSIC could not have come at a worse time for Indigenous people involved in education. Under the Howard Government, Indigenous students have continuously suffered attacks to their access, equity and participation in Australia’s higher education sector.

The National Union of Students argues that in the time between 1999 and 2001, there was an 8.3% drop in Indigenous enrolment in Australian universities. In 2001, Indigenous students represented only 1.26% of the total undergraduate population in Australian universities.

Statistics from the Human rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, further demonstrate the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participation in higher education.

Highest non-school qualification, Percentage of persons aged 15 years and over, 2001

	Indigenous people (%)	Non-Indigenous people (%)
Postgraduate degree	0.28	1.91
Bachelor degree	2.26	10.23
Graduate Diploma	0.36	1.44

Advanced diploma / Diploma	2.49	6.29
Certificate	9.38	16.43
Other / Level not determined	2.76	3.56
No qualification	72.14	55.30
Not stated	10.33	4.84

Issues surrounding student income support in another area where Indigenous students need support from a body like ATSIC. Federal Government changes to ABSTUDY in 2000 resulted in less Indigenous students being able to access this essential source of student income support. Since the 2000 ABSTUDY changes, there has been a continual decline in number of ABSTUDY recipients in Australia. The National Union of Students presented the following figures in their submission to the Senate Inquiry into Student Income Support:

Number of Higher Education ABSTUDY Recipients.

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Higher Education Students	6 749	6 356	5 845	5 688	5 476

Further attacks on ABSTUDY came in June of this year when the Federal Government announced a reduction in the number of ABSTUDY administration centres. This restructure pre-empted the release of a Federal review of ABSTUDY.

These issues only begin to cover the obstacles faced by Indigenous students participating in tertiary studies in Australia. ATSIC has been an instrumental source of representation and support for the Indigenous community regarding issues in higher education.

Listed below are examples of the important work ATSIC has contributed to the higher education sector over the last ten years:

- ABSTUDY: An Investment for Tomorrow's Employment, 1998
- Analysis of the Proposed Changes to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Study Assistance Scheme (ABSTUDY) on Indigenous Students Final Report, May 1999
- ATSI Submission to the Review into Aboriginal Education in the Northern Territory, May 1999
- ATSI Submission to the "Katu Kalpa" Inquiry into the Effectiveness of Education and Training Programs for Indigenous Australians, July 1999
- ATSI Submission to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education in Australia, November 1999
- ABSTUDY: Dissemination & Alternative Support for Mature Age Indigenous Students, August 2000
- ATSI Submission to the Higher Education Review, September 2002
- ATSI Submission to the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, October 2002
- ATSI Submission to Stage 2 of the Review of Indigenous Education Direct Assistance (IEDA), November 2002 & March 2003
- ATSI Submission to the Joint Centrelink/DEST Review of ABSTUDY Delivery 2002-2003, February 2003
- NSW Aboriginal Education Review, March 2004

The SAUA sees the abolition of ATSI as a removal of a very powerful advocate for Indigenous students and higher education in general. With no replacement self-determining Indigenous body in the government's future plans, the SAUA hold grave concerns for Indigenous students in Australia.

SAUA Overall Concerns

The SAUA shares the concerns of many other organisations throughout Australia regarding the impact of the removal of ATSI. The SAUA is concerned that the decision to abolish ATSI goes against the findings of the ATSI review that the Federal Government itself conducted.

The SAUA supports the concerns raised by ***Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation***. The abolition of ATSIC represents a significant attack on Indigenous participation in Government decision-making and policy. It strikes at the right of the Indigenous community to self-representation and self-determination, and further continues the Federal Government's dismal adherence to Australia's international human rights obligations.

Consultation with the Indigenous community about this legislation appears to have not been a priority for the Federal Government. The proposed advisory panel suggested by the government fails to address any of the shortcomings in the 2003 ATSIC Review and is tokenistic in its approach to Indigenous participation in the decisions that affect the Indigenous community.

Mainstream Indigenous service delivery has failed the Indigenous community in the past and a return to such service provision represents nothing more than a step back of 30 years in time. The Indigenous community need to be actively and effectively involved in the provision of services to their community. ATSIC was only responsible for 15% of services delivered to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The other 85% is and continues to be delivered through mainstream departments. In this respect if the delivering of services to the Indigenous community has failed to adequately reach and support the community, then it raises the question of the performance of the mainstream departments.

The SAUA is concerned about the future of the Torres Strait Regional Authority. With the Federal Government yet to announce plans regarding this Authority, the abolition of ATSIC leaves the Australian Indigenous community with fractured representation, advocacy and rights.

Conclusion

Under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Bill 2004*, the Indigenous voice will be removed from the Australian political landscape. The SAUA condemns the Federal Government for their appalling attitude and treatment of Australia's Indigenous community, typified by the intention to abolish ATSIC under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Bill 2004*.