

To the Senate Select Committee on the Administration of Indigenous Affairs

I call upon your sense of justice and common decency to block the legislation on the abolition of the ATSIC bill to be presented to the Senate House in the near future. It is with great disappointment that I again witness the racist attitude of the Howard and previous governments in the dismantling of Indigenous rights and control under the guise of patronizing approaches of we know what is 'best' for the rightful owners and most severely disadvantaged group of all Australians.

The only reason that Indigenous people are so disadvantaged is that for the past 200+ years, Indigenous people have been denied the right to govern and manage their own affairs in a land which is coined the 'lucky country' but for the Indigenous peoples in this nation, it is more like the most 'unlucky country'. ATSIC's responsibility is to develop policy regarding culturally appropriate or the indigenizing and the development of best practices with the aim of improving the living standards, social disadvantage and provide greater opportunities for Indigenous people. The budget that ATSIC is responsible for, however, minimized their ability to make real inroads into the health, employment and education outcomes, as the ATSIC budget only allowed for communal decision-making regarding housing, social and cultural programs and the delivery of CDEP (community development employment program) a type of two day a week work for the dole.

The Howard's government's is unjustified in abolishing ATSIC, when ATSIC has been the only federal body that has provided more financial assistance and on-going support to Indigenous communities working hard to deliver services, when mainstream services having little idea of community development processes and community ownership. Unlike the support given by ATSIC, Indigenous organizations in our community has only been able to access \$5000 from mainstream federal departments for a tree planting project over a period of twenty years. Mainstream services have failed to support Indigenous communities' aspirations and will continue to do so. Indigenous communities are deprived of direct funding and deterred by the lack of sensitivity from public servants, the mountains of paper work and time involved in seeking funds which come with no guarantees of funding.

In my own community of Kuranda, North Queensland, Indigenous statistics reveal that my own Indigenous community is on par with national figures. In the last twelve months, forty Indigenous people out of a population of 600 people died due to alcohol and lifestyle related diseases. Indigenous children in the local schools are more likely to be suspended, and perform lower in literacy and numeracy tests. Real employment is a pipe dream for the Indigenous people, CDEP (work for the dole) participants total 323 people. Indigenous secondary school graduates eventually become CDEP participants because of the limited employment opportunities given and available to Indigenous youth and adults in our rural district.

How can any government say that they have the answers for Indigenous people when they have failed Indigenous people and continue to dis-empower Indigenous people in their own country? ATSIC lifespan is only ten years and yet under the competent leadership provided by Acting Chair Lionel Quartermaine and Cairns and District Regional Council Chair Terry O'Shane, our district has seen significant development implemented on a local, state and federal level with state government agreements being developed, the COAG agreement, domestic violence policy, support services regionalized to assist Indigenous communities to manage their projects efficiently and competently. Indigenous people are competent people, unlike the stereotypes attempts made by this current government and public perception. Our Indigenous community in which I have been an executive member of a community organization for over eight years

operates a very successful self-funded and self-sufficient housing organization which has a policy of Indigenous home ownership, currently has 34 tenanted properties, provides an aged care service, youth sport and recreation program, justice program and untold hours of welfare support and assistance to the community at large. Many of us are volunteers, working in professional jobs and volunteering our time to the Indigenous community. I has spent and continue to spend hundred hours or more of my own personal family time speaking with elders, youth and community members in ascertaining needs of the community, writing submissions, lobbying politicians, assisting the local schools and community agencies, leading and implementing youth developmental programs and the list goes on. This is an example of many more Indigenous members of Indigenous communities volunteering their time to build the capacity of individuals and the community at large.

A New Way Forward Proposal

I Judith Enoch, wish to propose that a democratically elected National Board of Commissioners, two per state and territory be voted in by Indigenous people per state as currently operates within the Senate elections. The Board of Commissioners is vital to ensuring a national representative body is maintained to develop policies in determining Indigenous affairs which should be extended to include a wider responsibility for Indigenous health, education, employment, land purchase, housing, family and cultural programs. This National Board of Commissioners can ensure that a national budget, which should consist of 2% of the Gross National Product as in the case of the Indigenous people in Alaska, be distributed to regional councils for equal distribution according to Indigenous population, Indigenous expertise and prioritized needs.

The 2% Gross National Product is to form a basis of reparation to Indigenous people for dispossession, the slaughter and the systematic removal of Indigenous people from country and land ownership. In view of ATSIC's past regarding a few individuals embroiled in court cases and the need for reform in better policies of funding distribution, and educated leadership at a regional level, ATSIC needs to undergo a name change, perhaps being Australian Indigenous Management Forum (AIMF) (AIMF can also mean to Aim for a Future). The National Australian Indigenous Management Forum members can be comprised of professional Indigenous people with expertise in Indigenous community development, financial management, policy development and has the respect and backing of Indigenous communities in which they live.

Yours sincerely
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