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The Secretary,
Senate Select Committee on the
Administration of Indigenous Affairs,
Parliament House,
Canberra, 2600.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I appreciate the opportunity to provide input to the Committee's Inquiry on the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Bill 2004 & proposed related changes to the administration of Commonwealth Indigenous affairs policy.

Australia has an obligation to respect & protect the right of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples to self-determination, human rights, & First Peoples status & the inherent rights that flow from that status.

Central to the enjoyment of these rights is the ability of Indigenous people to determine who represents them locally, regionally, nationally & internationally. Indigenous Peoples of Australia alone must have this right, as well as the consequent right to make free & informed choices for themselves, their families & communities.

These changes are also contrary to the Government's own review of ATSIC which endorsed the need for elected Indigenous representation & greater control at a regional level.

Indigenous Australians have endorsed the need for a National Indigenous Representative Body which reflects their values & aspirations, & which is open, transparent & accountable to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people.

This body should have primary roles in representation & advocacy, be the principal source of Indigenous policy advice to government, & have control over the provision of Indigenous-specific services.

The right of representation & to determine their own affairs have also been shown to be critical factors in improving the PTO.

of well-being of Indigenous Australians. Outcomes are significantly better where there is full & effective Indigenous involvement in decision-making, strong Indigenous organisations & governance, & appropriate cultural recognition within both Indigenous & non-Indigenous institutions.

The wholesale return to mainstream-focused service delivery will be a backward step to a failed paternalistic approach. Mainstream service delivery does have an important role, however, this must be on the basis of being responsive to Indigenous community & cultural needs.

Governments, mainstream departments & agencies must be publicly accountable for the provision of services to Indigenous people & such accountability should include rigorous monitoring frameworks & the ability for Indigenous people to exercise such accountability.

Finally, any replacement for ATSIC must be determined in consultation & negotiation with Indigenous stakeholders, & on the basis of their informed consent. The Committee's report should provide strong endorsement of this principle.

Yours faithfully & prayerfully
Dawn Hocking