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

To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you, for the opportunity to provide input to the Committee's Inquiry on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioner Amendment Bill 2004 and the proposed related changes to the administration of Commonwealth Indigenous affairs policy.

When European settlement took over this country with force, Aborigines died from ball and shot, poisoned flour, strychnined waterholes, and smallpox. An estimated 600,000 Aborigines died following the invasion. Today, aboriginal infants are nearly three times more likely to die than non-aboriginal babies; Aborigines have a shorter life expectancy, face greater poverty, and higher levels of incarceration and suicide. This is totally unacceptable and I totally support the rights of Aborigines to self-determination, reconciliation and social justice.

Australia has an obligation to respect and protect the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to self-determination, human rights, First People's status and the inherent rights that come from having that status. Indigenous communities are best equipped to develop and implement appropriate mechanisms for self-determination and governance. Indigenous People's of Australia, alone, should determine who represents them locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

The Federal government has generated severe stress to Indigenous Australians by disbanding ATSIC, as a return to mainstream service delivery is not responsive to Indigenous cultural requirements. The current Bill and proposed administrative arrangements will deny the fundamental rights of Indigenous Australians. These changes also contradict the Federal government's own review of ATSIC, which endorsed the need for national elected Indigenous representatives, plus greater control at a regional level.

Australia should work collaboratively with the Aboriginal community to improve health, education and employment opportunities. A National Indigenous Representative Body should be open and accountable to the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. This Body should be the principal source of Indigenous policy advice to the government and have

control over the provision of Indigenous specific services. Replacement of ATSIC must be determined in close consultation and negotiation with Indigenous stakeholders, on the basis of their informed consent. The Committee's report should provide strong endorsement of this principle and rigorously monitor the provision of services to Indigenous people.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bruce Taylor". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Bruce Taylor