



**NGOONBI CO-OPERATIVE
SOCIETY LIMITED**

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Attention: Jonathon Curtis
Secretary
The Senate
Parliament House
Canberra

Email: Indigenous.Affairs@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary

Re: The Intended Abolition of ATSIC

The decision to abolish ATSIC on the 15 April 2004 appeared on the surface to be a knee jerk reaction to Mark Latham's public statement to close ATSIC. Mr Latham's statement before the 15th gave the Prime Minister the opportunity to openly dismantle ATSIC.

Prior to this the Prime Minister was from our community's point of view systematically dismantling ATSIC in many ways. For instance through insufficient funding to undertake the work required and through the Separation of Powers resulting in the subsequent establishment of ATSIS and the deceptive manner in which ATSIC Commissioners were coerced into believing that in Policy Development and Implementation, they, as democratically elected Indigenous ATSIC Councillors would have real impact on affairs as it affected Australia's Indigenous people. The majority of these Councillors believed that as Policy Makers they would be effective and efficient advisors and a 'watchdog' authority to State and Federal Government Agencies and Departments who provide a service and or programs to Indigenous people, knowing from first hand experience at the coal face that these same providers

needed to be made accountable for the funds they received to deliver services to the Indigenous community. Although there have been some inroads into addressing and improving the health, education and employment status of Indigenous people, the fact remains that very little or no real improvement is evidenced on the ground.

The majority of Indigenous people live well below the poverty line with very little opportunity for meaningful employment, cultural identity and pride is eroded by government instituted divide and conquer mechanisms which includes native title. We live in overcrowded conditions that contribute to a whole host of adverse social conditions, we are over represented in prisons and health status is not even on a par with third world standards in third world countries.

To the Indigenous people of Kuranda and across Australia the intended Abolition of ATSIC means that we are losing our democratic right to self-determination, which is Indigenous people determining the future for Indigenous people in this country. Indigenous people continue to be marginalised, patronised, and completely disregarded only because of this country's government failure to make amends for the dispossession of Indigenous land and resources. Indigenous people have never conceded this country over to governments!

The country's national anthem speaks of advancing Australia, but how can Australia be advanced when Indigenous peoples are trodden upon and fail to gain equal distribution and opportunity of Australia's wealth and resources. Australia's Indigenous people are still today forced into being assimilated and mainstreamed into White Australia without any regard or respect for cultural differences, specific needs, any thought for the already agreed upon reconciliation process and without thought to the gross inequity experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at all levels of society. Indigenous people can only be equal citizens in this country when the constitution of this country rightfully installs Indigenous people as the true owners and recompense and make restitution to all Indigenous tribes.

Aboriginal people are fed up with the scraps dished out to Indigenous organizations and the wastage of Indigenous monies by mainstream departments who are only in place to answer to the government, ignoring Indigenous people's right to be self determined, self managed and equally resourced. As citizens of this country we, as Indigenous people have the right to shelter, food, resources, good physical, emotional and spiritual health, and wealth, longevity of life and just the knowledge and feeling of being 'safe'.

Today's government still fail to be accountable to the Indigenous community and world human rights records and or conventions. Today's government without regard or conscious provide mainstream departments that are ethnocentrically driven and totally inappropriate in meeting Indigenous needs. How long do we, as Indigenous people have to tell the local, state and in this case the federal government that mainstreaming or assimilation approaches do not work for Indigenous Communities and will never address the dire social issues faced by the Indigenous people of Australia.

The Abolition of ATSIC is yet another example of the patronising and abusive nature in which government mainstream Australia treats it's first people.

Does the government intend to continue this insanity or will the Australian government rightfully give back to Indigenous people and their communities a percentage of the Gross National Product (GNP) as is the case of Indigenous Alaska. The GNP can then form the basis of Indigenous funding for Indigenous community's own programs, delivering their own services in health, education, employment, industries towards sustainability, independence and a true and meaningful change to the chronic widespread social issues faced by Australia's Indigenous peoples.

The Government still has to tell ATSIC where they have failed. John Howard continually blames ATSIC for lack of progress in health, education and employment programs as they affect Indigenous people, yet these programs are not managed by ATSIC but by government themselves.

Locally, as like most other Indigenous Communities throughout Australia, health, education, employment, economic status and general emotional and social well being remain a major issue that has great impact and dire consequences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. What other cultural groups with a population of 640 permanent residents attend 24 local funerals over a period of 14 months not including indigenous deaths in other communities such as Mareeba, Cairns and surrounding district. The vast majority of these deaths were caused by entrenched alcohol and or related social conditions and only a very small minority can be attributed to old age.

Ngoonbi Co-operative Society Limited provides houses for the Indigenous people of Kuranda. According to research completed and compiled by the Kuranda Aboriginal Community we have an average of 9 people per household within our district. This means overcrowding and social and emotional problems are ongoing.

ATSIC supported the following programs to the Aboriginal Community of Kuranda:

- NAIDOC Activities
- Social programs
- Cultural Activities
- Housing support (CHIP Funding)
- Home Ownership
- CDEP

Without the support of ATSIC we will rapidly regress in our progress in addressing the needs of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Ngoonbi Cooperative Society Ltd is the lead Indigenous agency in the community of Kuranda and the abolishment of ATSIC has increased the workload of our already under resourced and highly stretched service delivery. More individual members and groups of this community locally and from throughout the region are now coming to this organisation for assistance. Notwithstanding the fact that our core business in local housing we are forced to take on other roles to meet the expressed social and justice needs of the entire community.

Currently, the intended abolition of ATSIC is creating CHAOS in services, disillusionment amongst Indigenous people and community. To add to this chaos,

regional structures such as the CDEP and Housing whose sole existence depended on ATSIC funding has taken an aggressive and highly politicised take over role to secure their future existence. This is being done without due governance process, and or consideration for organisations such as ourselves who provide a localised service. These regional structures with assistance from government are disempowering local communities and going away from what ATSIC had set them up to do in ensuring that support and assistance was provided whilst assisting the local community structures to become strengthened and capable for future sustainability towards self reliance and self sufficiency and out of the welfare system.

There is no where for people to go at present and the recent moves to dismantle ATSIC has added to the burden carried by Indigenous people and has put self development and Indigenous progress back many years considering the decision was politically motivated and with no consultation at ground level and done in deceitful ways to demoralise and to further disenfranchise an already marginalised and dispossessed cultural group of people who are the First Peoples of this Nation.

To further add insults to the injury John Howard, the Prime Minister of Australia did so with no clear action oriented strategy in mind to bring equity and equality in a humane way to the Indigenous population of Australia.

Objections:

Ngoonbi Co-Operative Society objects to the intent to abolish ATSIC.

Ngoonbi Co-Operative Society objects to the removal of the democratically elected voice representing Indigenous people in government.

Ngoonbi Co-Operative Society objects to the devious and dishonest manner in which the current suspension of ATSIC has been instituted.

Ngoonbi Co-Operative Society objects to the continued violation of human rights as it concerns all minority groups in Australia and in particular Australia's Aboriginal people.

Ngoonbi Co-Operative Society objects to the continued genocide policies of assimilating Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Ngoonbi Co-Operative Society objects to the mainstreaming of all services to Indigenous people knowing that mainstreaming never worked in the past, do not work now and will never work in the future.

Ngoonbi Co-Operative Society objects to any government appointed Indigenous advisors to government knowing that whilst government never listened to ATSIC why should they the government listen to their own appointed Indigenous advisors other than to use them in a rubber stamping role.

What can you as Senators Do?

Members of this Senate Inquiry can object to the intent to abolish ATSIC.

Members of this Senate Inquiry can demand that a democratically elected voice representing Indigenous people to government be retained.

Members of this Senate Inquiry can demonstrate and insist that all dealings in regards to Indigenous Affairs are carried out in an honest, open and consultative manner.

Members of this Senate Inquiry can draw attention to and highlight the continued violation of human rights as it concerns Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Members of this Senate Inquiry can protest the continued genocide policies of Indigenous assimilation.

Members of this Senate Inquiry can halt the mainstreaming of services to Indigenous people.

Members of this Senate Inquiry can object to any government attempt to establish a government appointed Indigenous advisory group.

Members of this Senate Inquiry can insist that the ATSIC review recommendation to Retain and Reform the current structure.

Glenis Grogan
Executive Officer

For and on behalf of the Board of Directors