



**ATSIC**

**Submission to the**

**Australian Senate Select Committee on the  
Administration of Indigenous Affairs**

**Inquiry into the ATSIC Amendment Bill,  
Mainstreaming of Indigenous Programs,  
and Related Matters**

**August 2004**

**Nulla Wimila Kutju Regional Council  
Patpa Warra Yunti Regional Council  
Wangka Wilurrara Regional Council**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

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### **Attachments:**

- One: Petition*
- Two: Regional Council Powers, Functions and Responsibilities*
- Three: South Australian Health Partnership*
- Four: It's Like Apartheid*

## Submission Authorisation

This submission is a joint response to the Senate Select Committee on the Administration of Indigenous Affairs from the three Regional Councils in South Australia:

- Nulla Wimila Kutju Regional Council
- Patpa Warra Yunti Regional Council
- Wangka Wilurrara Regional Council

The content of this submission has been determined by Regional Councillors and the three Regional Council Chairpersons – Mr Alwyn McKenzie, Nulla Wimila Kutju Regional Council; Mr Tauto Sansbury, Patpa Warra Yunti Regional Council and Mr Harry Miller, Wangka Wilurrara Regional Council.

Whilst members of separate and independent Councils, for the purpose of this submission we are providing a united response to strongly defend the rights of self-determination and self-management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

On behalf of the three Regional Councils and my fellow Chairpersons, I authorise this document to be submitted to the Senate Select Committee Inquiry.



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## 1 Executive Summary

This submission argues that the proposed Government changes outlined in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Bill 2004 will eradicate Indigenous self-determination (which is contrary to the aspirations of our people) and that the move toward mainstreaming service provision is unlikely to produce more effective outcomes for our people. The submission specifically:

- Emphasises the importance of Indigenous self-determination and the need to retain some form of elected Indigenous representation on a regional and national basis.
- Questions the rationale for administering Indigenous programs and services through mainstream agencies and government departments.
- Outlines the importance of Regional Councils and an elected national body to the long-term development and wellbeing of Indigenous people.

The underlying rationale is that elected Indigenous representative bodies at a regional and national level are able to perform valuable functions that cannot be provided by mainstream agencies and Government departments because they have the confidence of Indigenous people and a greater understanding of their cultural issues, aspirations and needs.

*For the purpose of this submission we:*

- Oppose any legislation to abolish ATSIC unless and until an alternative elected representative structure, developed and approved by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, is put in place to assume the functions currently undertaken by ATSIC.
- Oppose any move to appoint a National Indigenous Council as an advisory committee to government as this is contrary to the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to elect their own representatives.
- Oppose any move to diminish, dismantle, destroy and erode the principles of self-determination and self-management since any such action would undermine the hard won rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Oppose the proposal to mainstream services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as this would continue to severely disadvantage our people.

We fear that mainstream agencies, without the support of an elected Indigenous structure, would not have the necessary understanding and cultural awareness to deal with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in an appropriate manner. We also believe that without the support of democratically elected Indigenous representatives, proper consultations would not occur with the right people thus leading to our community needs remaining unmet.

## **2 Terms of Reference**

The Senate Select Committee on the Administration of Indigenous Affairs was appointed to inquire into the following matters:

- a) The provisions of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Bill 2004;
- b) The proposed administration of Indigenous programs and services by mainstream departments and agencies; and
- c) Related matters

### **3 The provisions of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Bill 2004**

*We oppose this Bill for the following reasons:*

#### **The Bill will abolish democratically elected Indigenous representation.**

The Bill aims to abolish the ATSIC Board of Commissioners and Regional Councils. They are the only democratically elected representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This is presently recognised under Australian Law, but this recognition will be negated if the ATSIC Amendment Bill is passed.

The need for democratically elected national and regional Indigenous representation as the basis for negotiations with the Australian and State Governments is regarded as a fundamental right by Indigenous people. This principle was unanimously endorsed at a meeting between South Australian Regional Council Chairpersons and the Zone Commissioner on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2004, and is supported by approximately 3,000 people who have signed petitions to this affect – see *Attachment One: Petition*.

The consequences of removing democratically elected Indigenous representation will be extremely negative and far reaching and is critical to an objective analysis of the Amendment Bill.

#### **The Bill will prevent Indigenous people from having input into Indigenous policy development.**

The Board of Commissioners (BOC) and Regional Councils presently have the responsibility for preparing Indigenous specific policies at the national, state and regional level.

The abolition of BOC and Regional Councils will prevent Indigenous people from determining policies that impact their lives and wellbeing.

If the Amendment Bill is passed, Indigenous policy will be primarily determined by Government. This will largely occur without Indigenous input because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience extreme difficulty in getting representatives elected to State and Federal Parliament due to their low population mass.

#### **The Bill will remove advocacy from the Indigenous affairs agenda.**

BOC and Regional Councils have primary responsibility for advocating on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the national, state and regional level. Advocacy is an extremely important role and is essential to the determination of agreements and partnerships with government departments and agencies that provide services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

One of the government's previous arguments against ATSIC was that the organisation had conflicting roles in advocating on behalf of Indigenous people on the one hand and allocating program funding and providing impartial advice on the other. The government therefore established ATSI in July 2003 to separate the advocacy and funding functions.

However, the new arrangements as proposed under the Amendment Bill go one step further with significant and detrimental consequences.

The abolition of BOC and Regional Councils will delete Indigenous voice and totally remove advocacy from the Indigenous affairs agenda.

This will leave decisions about the destiny and well-being of Indigenous people in the hands of mainstream bureaucracies which are proven to have little knowledge and understanding of the unique socio-economic needs of Indigenous people. The removal of the ability to advocate will severely disadvantage Indigenous people.

The government proposal to appoint a National Indigenous Council (NIC) will not overcome the advocacy dilemma because the intended role of the NIC is to provide advice to government - not to advocate on behalf of Indigenous people.

### **The Bill blames ATSIC for the lack of effective service delivery outcomes.**

The Government argument for the abolition of ATSIC is based on the premise that ATSIC is responsible for the lack of effective outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. But this rationale is severely flawed.

ATSIC has only ever been a supplementary provider of services and programs to Indigenous people. The bulk of the funding, and many of the programs for Indigenous people – particularly those in the key areas of health and education – have been the responsibility of Commonwealth and State Government departments.

For example, in 1995, the previous Government transferred the responsibility for Indigenous health from ATSIC to the Department of Health and Aging largely because of concerns about the performance of ATSIC.

But data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare for the period 1999-2001 indicates that "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people suffer greater ill health, are more likely to experience disability and reduced quality of life and to die at younger ages than non-Aboriginal Australians. Similarly, data provided by the Productivity Commission, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2003*, indicates that Aboriginal life expectancy at birth is approximately 20 years less than for the non-Aboriginal population - e.g. 56.3 years for Aboriginal males compared with 77.0 years for all Australian males and 62.8 years for Aboriginal females compared to 82.4 years for all Australian females".

This data seriously questions the ability of the Department of Health and Aging to deliver effective health services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over the last nine years. (Similar comment can be made about the inability of State Government education departments to deliver education outcomes for Indigenous people).

This begs the question about why the Australian Government – for the same reasons provided to abolish ATSIC - does not abolish the Department of Health and Aging for its failure to achieve effective Indigenous health outcomes.

In short, ATSIC is an easy target and has become the scapegoat for the general failure of government to address Indigenous disadvantage.

This was recognised by the ATSIC Review Panel which commented that “mainstream Commonwealth and State Government agencies from time to time have used the existence of ATSIC to avoid or minimise their responsibilities to overcome the significant disadvantage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people” and, that by blaming ATSIC “those mainstream agencies, their ministers and governments have avoided responsibility for their own shortcomings.” – *In the Hands of the Regions – A New ATSIC*, Report of the review of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, November 2003, page 30.

### **The Bill totally ignores the successes of ATSIC and Regional Councils**

The perception that ATSIC is to blame for the lack of effective outcomes for Indigenous people totally overlooks the achievements of the organisation. The Bill refuses to acknowledge that ATSIC, and Regional Councils in particular, have made notable achievements over the years and that some of the best outcomes have been produced by ATSIC funded projects that were facilitated and managed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Regional Councils were created by the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989* (the Act) and there are presently 35 Regional Councils covering all parts of Australia. Regional Councils have important functions and responsibilities that are outlined in the Act - notably Sections 94 and 95 - see *Attachment Two: Regional Council Powers, Functions & Responsibilities*.

Regional Councillors are chosen by their communities and play the same role as Members of Parliament – i.e. they have willingly committed themselves to exploring opportunities, identifying resources and developing strategic partnerships for the benefit of their communities.

The achievements of ATSIC and Regional Councils in South Australia include (but are not limited to):

- The development of Regional Council policies and plans for improving the implementation of services and programs,



- The establishment of critical alliances and partnerships, particularly at State and Regional levels – e.g. local government partnerships and agreements, *The South Australian Aboriginal Health Partnership* (see *Attachment Three*), the *Partnering Agreement between The Government of South Australia and ATSIC*, the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Framework Agreement between the State of South Australia, the Commonwealth of Australia, ATSIC and the Aboriginal health Council of South Australia*, and the *South Australian Single Planning framework for Essential Services, Infrastructure and Housing*,
- Significant advocacy achievements - such as support for a culturally appropriate crossing to Hindmarsh Island, strengthening education outcomes in South Australian schools through advocacy with the Department for Education and Children’s Services, the adoption of family violence prevention plans and the inclusion of these plans within the strategic plans of regional domestic violence prevention agencies,
- The creation of training and employment opportunities for Indigenous people through Community Development Employment Programs (CDEP),
- The provision of improved infrastructure, housing and roads in remote and rural communities, and
- Significant contributions and advocacy by Regional Councillor Portfolio Holders on heritage, conservation and other boards and committees of local and state government.

**The Bill ignores the importance of retaining elected national representatives.**

Zone Commissioners have an extremely important role in representing the Aboriginal community, determining policy at a national level, providing advocacy and leadership at a State level through State Executive Committees, and supporting Indigenous communities and Regional Councils to achieve their initiatives.

South Australian Regional Councils acknowledge that Zone Commissioners have an extremely important function in helping to create access to Members of Parliament and government department CEO’s.

Zone Commissioners also hold important positions on regional, Local Government, State Government and other boards – such as the Board of Management of the Aboriginal Housing Authority of South Australia, the Social and Economic Participation Board, the Land and Water Development Committee (which has responsibility for native title, land and water rights, economic development and the Indigenous Land Fund), and the Australian Indigenous Training Advisory Committee.

The abolishment of ATSIC and the Board of Commissioners will generally disadvantage the development of Aboriginal affairs by preventing Indigenous people from providing important input to higher level boards and committees as well as make it much harder to achieve local and regional initiatives.

**The Bill will prevent Indigenous people from having input into the performance and implementation other important Acts.**

The Bill has consequential implications by removing the requirement for Aboriginal people to be consulted about, provide information and comment on, or have representation on boards and committees relevant to the following Acts.

- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984.*
- *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976.*
- *Aboriginal Land (Lake Condah and Framlingham Forest) Act 1987.*
- *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976.*
- *Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Act 1989.*
- *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.*
- *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986.*
- *National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992.*
- *Native Title Act 1993.*
- *Remuneration Tribunal Act 1973.*
- *Social Security Act 1991.*

The consequence is that performance monitoring of these Acts and the provision of advice will mainly be undertaken by non-Indigenous public servants and exclude Indigenous input.

**The Bill is discriminatory.**

The Bill discriminates against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living on mainland Australia and Tasmania; because it preserves the benefits of people living in the Torres Strait Islander region through retention of the Torres Strait Regional Authority.

**The decision to amend the ATSIC Act was determined without appropriate analysis and consultation.**

There is concern that the decision to amend the ATSIC Act was undertaken in haste and without proper analysis, review and consultation. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were certainly not consulted about the Bill.

Importantly, the Bill ignores the recommendations of the ATSIC Review in which the Review Panel stated that “the preferred future for ATSIC is a single organisation with a legislated delineation of roles between the elected and administrative arm” (*In the hands of the Regions – A New ATSIC*, Report on the Review of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, November 2003, page 80).

#### **4 The proposed administration of Indigenous programs and services by mainstream departments and agencies**

**The Bill is based on the rationale that mainstream agencies will achieve more effective outcomes than ATSIC.**

The new administrative arrangements proposed through the Amendment Bill assume that mainstream agencies will achieve more effective outcomes for Indigenous people.

For example, the Government argued that one advantage of mainstreaming Indigenous services and programs is that specialist service delivery expertise will be focussed on specific aspects of Indigenous disadvantage – *Second Reading Speech, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Bill 2004*.

However, the demonstrated failings of mainstream agencies – such as Departments of Health and Education - to deliver effective outcomes for Indigenous people is major concern for many people involved in the field of Aboriginal affairs. These concerns have been raised in many key documents such as the *ATSIC Review 2003*; the Commonwealth Grants Commission report and the Productivity Commission report *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2003*. The concerns are too numerous to detail but include:

- The lack of persuasive evidence that Indigenous programs can be delivered more effectively by mainstream agencies.
- Recognition that State and Commonwealth Governments will not always be able to provide programs that are tailored to meet the individual needs of Indigenous communities.
- Fear that funding for Indigenous specific outcomes could easily disappear into general mainstream programs through cost-shifting and absorption. (This is clearly demonstrated in education programs where schools are provided with additional funding based on the number of Indigenous students enrolled, but the funds are absorbed for general use in global school budgets).
- Bureaucratic barriers – such as program design, program presentation, funding conditions, user costs and lack of Indigenous staff - that tend to deter Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander from accessing mainstream services. This is evidenced by lower participation rates in mainstream services by Indigenous people - especially in remote areas where there are additional barriers such as the lack of services and long distances to travel to access existing services. This lower participation rate in mainstream services arguably compounds, rather than addresses, Indigenous disadvantage.

The key questions that need to be addressed are:

How are mainstream agencies going to change their performance to meet the unique socio-economic needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and how will the agencies be monitored to ensure they become accountable for producing effective outcomes?

The Government has outlined a new whole-of-government, coordinated approach to service delivery that will be monitored by a Ministerial Taskforce with support from a Secretaries Group and include annual reporting against socio-economic indicators.

However, there is a dearth of detail about how the coordinated approach will be achieved. Regional Partnership and Shared Responsibility Agreements have been proposed but the new arrangements, particularly the operation of Indigenous Coordination Centres; still appear to largely rely upon inter-departmental goodwill and cooperation – which is a proven operational contradiction in the public service sector. In the short term since ATSI staff have been mapped into other departments, there has been a noticeable development of departmental silos, despite assurances that this would not occur.

There are similar concerns about the efficacy of the proposed monitoring and evaluation process because, after years of poor mainstream agency performance; it is understandable that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are sceptical about the Government's ability to fulfil its promises.

In summary, the provision of services through mainstream agencies has generally failed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and there are serious doubts that they will provide more effective services than ATSI. Furthermore, there is strength of opinion – identified in the ATSI Review - that an ATSI like organisation should be retained because it could play a very valuable role in being the interface to link state and national programs with community needs.

**The proposed administrative arrangements will negate the principle of Indigenous self-determination.**

The abolition of elected Indigenous representation and the mainstreaming of services undermine the principles of self-determination and self-management that are so strongly supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We prefer that services are delivered to our people by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and believe that pro-active capacity building initiatives must be implemented to strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to produce more effective outcomes.

We believe that the Government's proposed administrative changes will maintain a welfare dependency ethic, whereas Regional Councils have been

steadfastly moving their organisations from inter-dependence to independence.

If the new administrative arrangements are adopted, how will the mainstream agencies enhance the self reliance, self determination and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

The proposal to appoint a non-statutory National Indigenous Council, comprised of distinguished Indigenous people as a forum for Indigenous Australians to provide policy advice to government, totally removes the right of our people to have their say about who should best represent their interests.

So much for democracy, empowerment and the self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

## **5 Other related matters**

### **The preferred model for the administration of Indigenous Affairs.**

Rather than abolishing ATSIC and providing services through mainstream agencies, we have preference for administering Indigenous affairs through a single organisation based on the ATSIC model.

We support the recommendations of the ATSIC Review Panel which identified that the preferred future is a single organisation with a legislated delineation of roles between an elected and an administrative arm.

We believe that a revised single organisation can be determined which retains all the benefits of having elected Indigenous representation nationally and regionally, but optimises performance and efficiency through the removal of duplicated policy, program and other functions that were experienced in ATSIC. We believe that the following improvements could be considered:

- In view of the negative perceptions about ATSIC in the broader Australian community, the name ATSIC should be changed.
- Elected Regional Councils and a National representative body should be retained.
- The operations of the national body should be improved by reducing the membership from 18 to approximately 13 people – preferably with equal representation among the states and territories.
- As Torres Strait Islander peoples have their own Torres Strait Regional Authority, there is no need for Torres Strait Islander people to be represented on the new organisation.
- The relationship between Regional Councils and the national body could be improved by having more open channels of two-way communication, including Regional Council input into national papers, agenda and decisions.

- The operational model should have a bottom up structure, ensuring that the power lies with the regions and that a community driven consultative model is achieved.
- The Regional and National elected arm should be responsible for policy and advocacy and have the ability to make government and Indigenous organisations accountable for their outcomes – i.e. possibly through a direct relationship with the Senate Estimates Committee.
- Indigenous representatives should be elected for four year terms – the same as Members of Parliament.

Importantly, this proposed administrative model will retain Regional Councils as the peak body to assist and facilitate programme delivery to Indigenous communities. This is preferable to mainstreaming for the various reasons already outlined in this submission.

### **The intentions of Regional Councils in South Australia.**

Regional Councils were elected to fulfil the functions and roles outlined in section 94 and 95 of the ATSIC Act.

The proposed Government arrangement as outlined in the ATSIC Amendment Bill is for Regional Councils to be retained in an advisory capacity until 30<sup>th</sup> June 2005. However, our intent to:

- Facilitate and develop regional structures and continue to advocate for and represent our people's needs in political forums.
- Continue to formulate partnerships with the South Australian Government through the Premier's Indigenous Coordinating Committee, and the State Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation along with respective Commonwealth agencies in order to ensure that Regional Council policies, plans and priorities are incorporated into decisions concerning service delivery outcomes.
- Develop further joint agreements with local governments.
- Develop a model for Regional governance that is community driven and recognises the diversity in our regions.
- Continue to determine effective strategies for Action Zones in consultation with State and Commonwealth agencies.

## 6 Summary

Rather than address the specific details of the Amendments to the ATSIC Act, this submission concentrates on the impact and consequences of the Government Bill.

This submission demonstrates that the overall consequence is that the Bill will exclude Indigenous people from participating in policy development, advocacy, service delivery and other matters that concern the wellbeing and quality of their lives.

In short, the Bill will totally nullify Indigenous voice in this country.

We therefore believe that the ATSIC Amendment Bill is fundamentally a racist action that ignores the democratic rights of Indigenous Australians.

The Bill also ignores our inherent right as first nation peoples of this country and is in breach of our human rights as identified in the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* – specifically Article 10 concerning the right “to be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person”.

We therefore believe that the Senate Select Committee should reject the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Amendment Bill 2004.

***ATTACHMENT ONE: PETITION.***



## **ATTACHMENT TWO: REGIONAL COUNCIL POWERS, FUNCTIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES.**

### **Section 94 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act, 1989: Functions of the Regional Council**

1. Each Regional Council has the following functions:
  - a. to formulate and revise from time to time, a regional plan for improving the economic, social and cultural status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents of the region;
  - b. to assist, advise and co-operate with the Commission, the TSRA, other Commonwealth bodies and State, Territory and local government bodies in the implementation of the regional plan;
  - c. to make proposals ,in accordance with section 97, in relation to the region;
  - d. to receive, and to pass on to the Commission and he TSRA, the views of Aboriginal persons and Torres Strait Islanders about activities about activities, in the region, of the Commission, the TSRA, other Commonwealth bodies and State, Territory and local government bodies;
  - e. to represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents of the region and to act as an advocate of their interests;
  - f. such other functions as are conferred on the Regional Council by or under this Act;
  - g. to do anything else that is incidental or conducive to the performance of any of the preceding functions

### **Section 95 of the Act: Powers of the Regional Council**

A Regional Council has power to do all things that are necessary or convenient to be done for or in connection with the performance of its functions.

**ATTACHMENT THREE: SOUTH AUSTRALIAN HEALTH PARTNERSHIP.**

# ATTACHMENT FOUR: IT'S LIKE APARTHEID.

From *The Advertiser*, Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> April 2004 – courtesy Advertiser Newspapers Pty Limited.

## VANSTONE'S VIEW ON PROGRAMS FOR ABORIGINES AND ATSI

# It's like apartheid



**George Trevorrow**  
Regional councillor from Coorong. Operates Aboriginal eco-tourism business. Serving his second term.

**Cheryl Axleby**  
Regional councillor from Adelaide. Works with Family and Youth Services. First term.

**Brian Butler**  
Regional councillor since 2002, based at Heathfield. Former SA commissioner on ATSI national board and now an advocate for the aged and disabled.

**Vic Wilson**  
Councillor from Murray Bridge serving his fourth term. Works with the Kalbarri Aboriginal substance abuse and rehabilitation facility.

**Tauto Sansbury**  
Chairman, served the four terms with ATSI since it was created. From Adelaide and the former chairman of the Aboriginal justice advisory committee.

**Heather Agius**  
Regional councillor from Adelaide. Serving her first term.

**Pat Buckskin**  
Deputy Chairwoman in her second term. From Adelaide and works for the Education Department as a manager in Aboriginal education.

By **MARIA MOSCARITOLO, MARK PHILLIPS and GREG KELTON**

THE Howard Government yesterday began a hard-sell of its plan to abolish the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, describing it as a hotbed of "favouritism and nepotism" and comparing it with South African apartheid.

This came as Aboriginal people pledged to march on Federal Parliament next month in protest.

As Aboriginal groups lashed out at the plan, the new co-ordinator of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands, Bob Collins, said he

would write to the Prime Minister to suggest a less divisive way forward.

Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Amanda Vanstone likened ATSI and the programs for Aboriginal people to apartheid and said "they deserve to get the same treatment that everybody else gets".

The Government plans to redirect the \$1.2 billion budgets of ATSI and its sister organisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services, into mainstream departments and appoint a hand-picked group to advise on indigenous policy. Mr Collins said this committee would have more credibility if it was

elected by the community. The Government hopes to pass legislation to scrap ATSI by July.

While the minor parties said they would block the plan, Labor - which has already proposed abolishing ATSI - indicated it was

and "we've got to work out now the best way of dealing with those issues so the money does get through to the real people".

Mr Howard maintained ATSI had not spent its money wisely. "I think the culture of favouritism and

health and education advancements," he said.

Members of the Patpa Warra Yunti regional council, which represents more than half of the state's 22,000 Aboriginal people, said the Government was blaming ATSI for failures of its own departments.

"ATSI and its regional councils have never run any mainstream programs like health, education, housing... this is a bluff game," said deputy chair Pat Buckskin. Council chairman Tauto Sansbury said without ATSI, Aboriginal people would lose any authority to hold the Government to account.

"There needs to be some

restructuring of ATSI but I don't think ATSI should be abolished to the point where we have no representation," he said.

"There are 35 regional councils around Australia that are doing the same thing that we're going to be doing - planning to march on federal parliament at the next sitting."

Mr Collins, involved in the independent review of ATSI, said the Government had over-reacted by abolishing it. "Regional councils are the real core of ATSI, and that's where most of the good work has been done, and much of it has been largely unrecognised," he said.

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**PAGE 29: Picking up the pieces**

unlikely to oppose the bill.

Premier Mike Rann yesterday joined the chorus of ATSI's political opponents to dub the 13-year-old organisation a "disgrace". He said ATSI had been a monumental failure

and "we've got to work out now the best way of dealing with those issues so the money does get through to the real people".

Mr Howard maintained ATSI had not spent its money wisely. "I think the culture of favouritism and