

102/4 Pound Road
HORNSBY 2077

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



Dear Sir/Madam,

We refer to your Committee's Inquiry on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Bill 2004 and proposed related changes to the administration of Commonwealth Indigenous affairs policy.

We are firmly convinced that the current bill and proposed administrative arrangements will deny the fundamental rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to self-determination. In reducing indigenous involvement to an appointed advisory role, the Government will effectively remove the right of indigenous people to meaningful involvement in decision-making affecting their lives and communities.

Indigenous people must have the right to determine who represents them locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. Indigenous peoples of Australia alone must have this right, as well as the right to make free and informed choices for themselves, and their communities.

We are shocked and deeply ashamed that the proposed changes contradict the Government's own review of ATSIC which endorsed the need for national elected indigenous representation, and greater control at a regional level.

Indigenous Australians themselves have endorsed the need for a national indigenous representative body which reflects their values and aspirations, and which is transparent and accountable to both them and to other Australians. A wholesale return to mainstream-focused service delivery will certainly be a backward step to a failed paternalistic approach to indigenous affairs.

Mainstream service delivery should continue to have an important role but this must be on the basis of being responsive to indigenous community and cultural needs. Governments, mainstream departments and agencies must be publicly accountable for the provision of services to indigenous people and such accountability should include rigorous monitoring frameworks and the ability for indigenous people to exercise such accountability.

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

Yours sincerely,


Bruce and Elva Kemp

17.7.04