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Sent: Thursday, 22 July 2004 6:01 PM
To: Committee, Indigenous Affairs (SEN)
Subject: Submissions

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

Dear Sir/Madan,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the 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.

The Australian government has an obligation to respect the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to self-determination. These rights include determining who represents them locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

The current bill and proposed administrative arrangements will deny these fundamental rights. These changes also contradict the government's own review of ATSIC.

Indigenous Australians have endorsed the need for a National Indigenous Representative Body which reflects their values and aspirations. It will be open, transparent and accountable. This body should have primary roles in representation and advocacy and be the principal source of Indigenous policy advice to the government, and have control over the provision of Indigenous-specific services.

The return to mainstream-focused service delivery will be a backward step to a failed paternalistic approach to Indigenous affairs. Government 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.

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 principal.

Yours sincerely

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