



Holdfast Bay Reconciliation Group

PO Box 713
Brighton SA 5048

22 July 2004

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



Dear Sir/Madam,

The Holdfast Bay Reconciliation Group welcomes 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.

We recognize that ATSIC has not provided a successful avenue for the conduct of Aboriginal affairs, but we are strongly opposed to the current Amendment Bill which denies Aboriginal people the right to self-determination and First Peoples' status.

We deplore the lack of consultation before ATSIC was abolished and in the preparation of the legislation now under review. This paternalistic approach demonstrates a return to the failed policies of the past. We believe that Indigenous people should have the right to determine who represents them locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

These fundamental rights will be denied under the current Bill, which will give Aboriginal people only an advisory role in laws and policies affecting their lives and communities. This is also contrary to the recommendations of the Government's own review of ATSIC, where the need for national elected Indigenous representation and greater control at regional level was stressed.

Indigenous Australians deserve a national Indigenous representative body which reflects their values and aspirations, is open, transparent and accountable, and provides policy advice to government. Self-determination has been shown to be a critical factor in improving the lot of Indigenous peoples world-wide.

Where mainstream services are used by Aboriginal people they must be responsive to their community and cultural needs, should be rigorously monitored, and should be developed in consultation with the people who use them.

We urge the members of your committee to respect the rights and culture of Aboriginal people including their right to self-determination.

Yours faithfully

Yvonne Allen
for the Holdfast Bay Reconciliation Group

Miriam Tonkin