



Mrs L Eggins
9 Stokes Avenue
ASQUITH 2077
23rd July, 2004

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

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thankyou for giving 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. As a non-Indigenous person, I would like to express my beliefs on this matter.

We in Australia should respect and protect the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to self-determination, human rights and the status of the First People of this land. The First People have rights which follow on as a matter of course from this status. All that is enjoyed by other citizens of this land has come as a result of what the First People have lost.

Most importantly, Indigenous people should be able to determine who represents them locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. It is the right of Indigenous People alone. They must also have the right to make free and informed choices for themselves, their families and communities. This is not the role of non-indigenous people. We do not have this right.

The current bill and proposed administrative arrangements will deny these fundamental rights. 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.

The right of representation and to determine their own affairs have also been shown to be critical factors in improving the well-being of Indigenous Australians. Outcomes are significantly better where there is full and effective Indigenous involvement in decision-making, strong Indigenous organisations and governance, and appropriate cultural recognition within both Indigenous and non-Indigenous institutions.

Indigenous Australians have endorsed the need for a National Indigenous Representative Body which reflects their values and aspirations, and which is open, transparent and accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is our responsibility to allow this to happen.

This body should have primary roles in representation and advocacy, be the principal source of Indigenous policy advice to government, and have control over the provision of Indigenous-specific services.

We cannot return to a system of mainstream-focused service delivery alone. This would revert to a failed paternalistic approach to Indigenous affairs. Indigenous people are poorly served by mainstream services and there would remain the need for Indigenous-specific services controlled by Indigenous people themselves.

Mainstream service delivery will continue to have an important role, however, 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.

In closing, I would like to emphasise that I strongly believe that any replacement for ATSIC must be determined in consultation and negotiation with Indigenous leaders on the basis of their informed consent. The Committee's report should provide endorsement of this principle.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "N.L. Eggins".

N.L. Eggins