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Wellington Point, QLD, 4160

22<sup>nd</sup> July 2004



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

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank 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.

Australia has an obligation to respect and protect the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to self-determination, human rights, and First Peoples' identity and the rights that come from this.

Most important is for the indigenous people to determine who represent them locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. Indigenous Australians are entitled to this, as well as the right to make free and informed choices for themselves, their families and communities.

The current bill and proposed administration arrangements will deny these rights. If indigenous involvement is reduced, the Government will remove the rights of Indigenous Australians to make meaningful decisions that directly affect their lives and those of their communities.

These changes also contradict the Governments own review of ATSIC, which approved the need for national elected indigenous representation, and greater control at regional level.

There is a need for a National Indigenous Representative Body that reflects the values and aspirations and which is accountable Indigenous Australians. This body should have primary roles in advocacy and representation, be the main source of indigenous policy advice to government and have control over indigenous specific services.

Critical factors in improving the well being of Indigenous Australians are the right of representation and to determine their own affairs. Involvement in decision-making and appropriate cultural recognition is also important.

The return to mainstream focused service delivery will be a backward step to a failed paternalistic approach to indigenous affairs. Mainstream service is important, however it needs to be responsive to the indigenous community and cultural requirements.

Governments, mainstream departments and agencies must be publicly accountable for the services for indigenous people and 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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rachel Prest".

Rachel Prest