

Shirley and John Gunson  
10 High Street  
Inverloch, Vic., 3996  
July 26th, 2004



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

Dear Sir/Madam,

We write to express our views regarding the changes to the administration of Commonwealth Indigenous affairs as proposed in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Commission Amendment Bill 2004.

1. Australia's international obligations. Australia has international rights obligations to our Indigenous people which would be severely undermined by this proposed legislation. We as a nation have an obligation to respect and protect the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination, human rights and First Peoples' status.
2. The right to self-determination. We strongly oppose the proposed replacement of ATSIC by a government appointed advisory body. Indigenous people must be involved in direct, meaningful decision making on matters which affect their communities and all aspects of their lives. Experience has shown that only when this takes place is a lasting improvement to indigenous living conditions, health and welfare possible, e.g., successful health programmes have occurred in some local communities where thorough consultation, training of indigenous health workers and appropriate non-indigenous support is provided as requested.

Decision-making power must be retained at a national level with a national body which can reflect the hopes and values of indigenous people.

A return to mainstreaming of services without direct indigenous involvement in decision-making on a national, regional and local level would be a disastrous step and a return to failed policies which in the past led to severe indigenous disadvantage and discrimination.

We note that the government's own review of ATSIC has endorsed the need for elected indigenous representation.

3. A new structure. Any new structure should result from wide consultation with indigenous people. Where problems are perceived to have existed in ATSIC, the new structure should be such that it is able to address these issues including a new focus on regional and local roles, transparency and accountability. We note that in the past ATSIC has been blamed for many problems over which it had no control.

This new body should be the primary body for representing indigenous people and advocacy on their behalf.

Yours sincerely,

Shirley and John Gunson

Handwritten signatures of Shirley Gunson and John Gunson in cursive script.