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30 July 2004

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

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to you regarding 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.

I fear that the government's decision to abandon ATSIC and return all Indigenous-specific programs and funding to mainstream departments will take Indigenous affairs policy back to the 1960s.

As a nation, we have an obligation to respect and protect the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to self-determination, human rights, and First People's status.

The current bill effectively removes their right for meaningful involvement in making decisions that affect their lives and their communities.

I urge you to strongly endorse the fact that the right to representation and to determine their own affairs has been shown to be a critical factor in improving the well-being of Indigenous Australians.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Taylor