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From: Linda Wyse & Tom Wolkenberg [mailto:lintom@bigpond.com]

Sent: Friday, 30 July 2004 1:54 PM

To: Committee, Indigenous Affairs (SEN)

Subject: Submission to Senate Select Committee on the Administration of Indigenous Affairs

Attn The Secretary

Dear Sir/Madam,

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input to the Committee's Inquiry. Our submission is attached.

Your Sincerely

Helena Grunfeld and Tom Wolkenberg
on behalf of
Australian Jewish Democratic Society

AUSTRALIAN JEWISH DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

Submission to Senate Inquiry on the Administration of Indigenous Affairs

Preamble

The Australian Jewish Democratic Society 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.

The Australian Jewish Democratic Society is an organisation within the Australian Jewish community which is committed to: social justice and human rights; the struggle against all forms of racism including anti-semitism; the search for a negotiated solution to the Israel/Arab conflict; and equal rights, including land rights for Indigenous Australians. Our group has organised events related to Indigenous issues and has participated in the Reconciliation Walk and similar activities. Our monthly newsletter regularly features articles on Indigenous issues. 400 people attended one memorable public meeting initiated by AJDS and supported by a range of organisations within the Jewish community. The forum was addressed by Noel Pearson on the notorious 10 Point Plan, a speech that is still quoted. Our members are individually active in a range of organisations including- ANTaR, reconciliation groups, Action for Aboriginal Rights.

General Overview

As members of a Jewish organization, it is not surprising that our views are shaped both by 'the ethnic experience' and the tragedy of the Holocaust.

AJDS recognises that it is important for the Government to review the effectiveness of its departments, agencies and commissions in achieving the objectives of these organisations. However, such reviews should involve members of the communities serviced by the agency being reviewed.

Our opposition to the abolition of ATSIC is coloured by our concern that the Federal Government is still able to deny the right to a voice, let alone to deny the right to control the process under which that voice is developed, to the Indigenous community.

Importance of self-determination for Indigenous Australians

In respect of the Government's plans to "mainstream' Indigenous service delivery, we find it difficult to believe that a government could virtually deny the individuality of each Indigenous and ethnic group and force standardised services on any group.

Such mainstreaming is of particular concern when applied to Australia's Indigenous communities as it has been demonstrated that true representation and ability to determine their own affairs are 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.

The Australian Jewish Democratic Society urges the Senate to use its power to ensure that Indigenous communities are properly involved in determining the structure(s) through which these communities want to be represented, whether for service delivery or any other aspects of their democratic rights as Australian citizens and special rights as the First Peoples under Australia's international obligations.

Conclusion

The Government's current Bill to abolish ATSIC and replace it with a quite different structure not developed in conjunction with, let alone approved by, a representative Aboriginal body, and to 'mainstream' the provision of services and programs to the Indigenous community continues the process of denying Indigenous people their basic rights and undermines their efforts to make positive changes to their third world circumstances. The Government's plans should be strenuously opposed.