

From: Phil Hunt

Sent: Friday, 10 August 2007 6:16 PM

To: Legal and Constitutional, Committee (SEN)

Subject: Aboriginal land

Dear Committee members,

I am writing to you to urge you to reject the current Bill that seeks to amend the various pieces of legislation, including the *Racial Discrimination Act* and the *Northern Territory Land Rights Act*, so that more consultation with the Aboriginal community can take place.

I am sure there will be more eloquent and detailed submissions from many other concerned Australians, so I will not try and cover the issues in detail. I am no expert in child sexual abuse or health issues. My experience is from working with Indigenous communities over heritage issues. In the 15 or so years that I have been working, I have learned a lot. One of the greatest lessons is - most Australians have no idea how much suffering, trauma and distress Indigenous communities have gone through at the hands of non-Indigenous people, whether well-intentioned or not. Every time Aboriginal people begin to make some headway into the new paradigm forced on them from above, the rules change, the goal-posts shift.

The current raft of proposals is another abrupt change of government policy direction and it will fail. Indigenous people have been promised so much and let down horribly time and time again. Work *with* communities, not *for* them. Indigenous people need to be involved. There are so many wonderful grass roots projects that are slowly gaining ground. The recommendations made in the many reports that have been written *with* Indigenous involvement do not support this current government approach. Why won't governments listen to the community and follow the advice of people who are actually familiar with the issues?

I mean no disrespect for those drafting these new laws, but I believe it is the equivalent of putting parking inspectors in charge of homicide.

One of the fundamental causes of Indigenous societal breakdown is the lack of self-respect that people have for themselves. Instead of implementing government policy that increases this feeling of helplessness, why not follow up the many programs that instill respect in communities and also demonstrate to the wider society how important Indigenous knowledge of country is for land management. Over 60, 000 years they have survived. We have brought the environment to its knees in just over 200. Who needs to learn from whom?

Please give more time to consulting communities, particularly women, before passing these unfair laws.

yours sincerely

Phil Hunt