

From: Virginia Burns

Sent: Friday, 10 August 2007 5:12 PM

To: Legal and Constitutional, Committee (SEN)

Subject: NT National Emergency Response Bills

Dear Senator,

I write in response to the Bills currently under discussion in the Senate, and hope I am not too late.

When the Prime Minister first announced this action, I listened in vain for some reference to including consultation with the affected communities as a necessary condition. Anyone who takes an interest in Aboriginal affairs should know that where programs have been successful consultation and co-operation, with joint ownership of programs, has been an essential feature.

Furthermore, as a retired Social Worker, I shuddered at the ignorant insensitivity of the approach to child sexual abuse. Regardless of which community it occurs in - black, white or other - direct punitive action is likely to do as much harm as good. I am at least pleased to see that the doctors who have conducted the health checks have shown a little more awareness of the need to be more sensitive with the children, but the roots of sexual abuse frequently go back generations. No doubt some perpetrators were victims themselves, when they were taken from their communities and placed in Homes where the duty of care for these wards of the state was forgotten. Overcoming sexual abuse will take years of dedicated co-operative work, not only to protect the current generation, but to deal with, possibly rehabilitate, offenders and prevent the cycle of abuse continuing. Now, I ask, why there is no mention of Children or Child Protection in the Bills. Was the plight of the children merely an excuse for some other agenda? I ask the same question about the need to insulate the Bills from the operation of the Racial Discrimination Act. Why is it necessary to discriminate yet again against a people who have suffered so much discrimination in their lives?

My next question is about the Government's haste in pushing these Bills, with estimates for expenditure of half a billion dollars, through Parliament with so little time for either the Aboriginal population of the NT or the general Australian public to read, let alone consider, what they mean.

I commend to your attention the proposals of the Combined Aboriginal Organisations, with their suggestions of a two-staged approach, and for built in review and evaluation processes.

Yours sincerely,

Virginia Burns,