

**From:** Meredith Butler

**Sent:** Friday, 10 August 2007 4:53 PM

**To:** Legal and Constitutional, Committee (SEN)

**Cc:** Abetz, Eric (Senator); Adams, Judith (Senator); Joyce, Barnaby (Senator); Birmingham, Simon (Senator); Trood, Russell (Senator); Parry, Stephen (Senator); Sterle, Glenn (Senator); Troeth, Judith (Senator); Nettle, Kerry (Senator); Evans, Chris (Senator); Ferguson, Alan (Senator); Hutchins, Steve (Senator); Johnston, David (Senator); Faulkner, John (Senator); Hogg, John (Senator); Carr, Kim (Senator); Wong, Penelope (Senator); senator.campbell@aph.gov.au; Fifield, Mitchell (Senator); Chapman, Grant (Senator); Fierravanti-Wells, Concetta (Senator); Colbeck, Richard (Senator); Cormann, Mathias (Senator); Crossin, Patricia (Senator); Wortley, Dana (Senator); Ray, Robert (Senator); Scullion, Nigel (Senator); Stephens, Ursula (Senator); Allison, Lyn (Senator); Barnett, Guy (Senator); senator.bernard@aph.gov.au; Humphries, Gary (Senator); Eggleston, Alan (Senator); Patterson, Kay (Senator); Ronaldson, Michael (Senator); Siewert, Rachel (Senator); Fisher, Mary Jo (Senator); Hurley, Annette (Senator); Conroy, Stephen (Senator); Coonan, Helen (Senator); Webber, Ruth (Senator); Watson, John (Senator); O'Brien, Kerry (Senator); Polley, Helen (Senator); Sherry, Nick (Senator)

**Subject:** Another Australian urging you to vote against the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Bills currently before you

Dear Senator

I am writing to ask that you vote against the bills currently before you that would make changes to the NT Land Rights Act. It is evident and disgraceful that these bills have been rushed into parliament with no time allowed for thought and due consideration, and little respect for community consultation or submission.

These bills override the *Racial Discrimination Act*. Yet there is ample advice from experts in the field that they will do little to achieve their stated purpose - to protect Northern Territory Aboriginal children from abuse. The rationale given for these changes is that the Government is acting in response to the *Little Children Are Sacred* report. **Yet these bills include changes that are inconsistent with the recommendations of the writers of that report and are racially discriminatory.**

The first recommendation of the *Little Children Are Sacred* report was for governments and Indigenous community leaders to get together to come with a comprehensive plan to deal with issues of child abuse in Indigenous communities. The Federal Government has ignored this advice.

These bills before you today do not reflect the wishes of a large proportion of the Australian public. We believe they are racially discriminatory and designed to:

- seize Aboriginal land
- remove Aboriginal communities' ability to have a say on who can come onto their land
- force Aboriginal boards of directors to accept Canberra bureaucrats into their board rooms and make Aboriginal people more dependent on the bureaucracy.

Permits under the current Act allow Traditional Owners to control who comes onto their land, not just have a say: no permit, no entry. There has always been an exception for police and for people exercising a statutory function. Surely this is access enough to carry out the 'legitimate' work of government. However, it is obviously not enough for **this** government.

Shame on the writers of these bills and shame on those who think this 'quick (dirty) fix' will absolve them of responsibility for finding a solution to the awful situations many Indigenous communities find themselves in.

You are an Australian senator. You are accountable for finding a solution to a problem of your predecessors' (and mine) making. You can choose to do this by working with Indigenous elders and communities or you can choose to repeat the crimes of past governments, using 'child protection' and 'welfare' laws as a cover for actions that are, in the end, just another form of 'ethnic' cleansing.

The measures in these bills ignore decades of advice of Indigenous leaders and experts whose calls for urgent action have been ignored. The words 'children' or 'child' do not appear in the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Bills*. I do not believe that they have anything to do with protecting children but are a cynical political stunt on the part of a Federal Government grandstanding before a crucial election.

Any serious action on Aboriginal child abuse should draw on the Emergency Response and Development Plan developed by the Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the Northern Territory, the expertise of organisations like the Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care and Aboriginal professionals like Professor Judy Atkinson.

I would therefore ask you to take a principled stand and vote against this attack on this bill.

Regards

Mez Butler