

**From:** Peter Lewis VACCA.ORG  
**Sent:** Thursday, 9 August 2007 10:54 AM  
**To:** Legal and Constitutional, Committee (SEN)  
**Subject:** Inquiry into Northern Territory National Emergency Response

Dear Committee

The bills being introduced concerning the so-called 'Northern Territory National Emergency' will do little to protect Northern Territory Aboriginal children from abuse. It is inconsistent with the recommendations of the writers of the *Little Children Are Sacred* report and is 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. Surely this would be a more productive approach. Instead, the Federal Government has ignored the advice of experts and turned this into an opportunity to seize Aboriginal land, remove Aboriginal communities' ability to have a say on who can come onto their land, to force Aboriginal boards of directors to accept Canberra bureaucrats into their board rooms and make Aboriginal people more dependent on the bureaucracy.

These measures are not considered and ignore decades of advice from Indigenous leaders and experts in the field whose calls for urgent action have been ignored.

If the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Bills* had anything to do with child abuse, surely the words 'children' or 'child' would appear in the bill. The fact that these words never appear indicate to me that these bills are about something else. The fact that these bills are rushed and not to be given time for thought and due consideration means that they are about political advantage not serious policy formation and implementation.

The fact that they override the *Racial Discrimination Act* is a national disgrace. If this was happening to any other sector of the community there would be a community uproar.

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 organizations like the Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care and Aboriginal who prepared a *National Plan for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect in Aboriginal Communities* in 1995, made comprehensive proposals concerning Indigenous children's wellbeing in 2003 for the Prime Ministers Indigenous Family Violence and Child Abuse Summit, and have also made a comprehensive response to the *Little Children Are Sacred Report*,
- and Indigenous experts in the field such as Professor Judy Atkinson.

If this was a serious attempt at protecting children these bills would not be rushed. I believe they are not only bad policy but a national disgrace.

Yours faithfully  
Dr Peter Lewis