

From: Adrienne Patterson Sent: Thursday, 9 August 2007 3:37 PM
To: Legal and Constitutional, Committee (SEN)
Subject: Northern Territory National Emergency Response Bills

Dear Senators,

In the interest of national reconciliation, I would like you to vote against the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Bills. The reasons are as follows:

These bills override the Racial Discrimination Act.

These bills have been rushed into parliament and do not allow for thought and due consideration.

The changes will do little to protect Northern Territory Aboriginal children from abuse, are inconsistent with the recommendations of the writers of the "Little Children Are Sacred" 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. Federal Government has ignored this advice.

The bills 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.

These measures are not considered and 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. They have nothing to do with protecting children.

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 professionals like Professor Judy Atkinson.

I would therefore ask you to take a principled stand and vote against these bills, stating that you do so to ensure that the cause of national reconciliation is not further harmed, while supporting urgent implementation of the recommendations of the "Little Children Are Sacred " report.

Yours sincerely
Adrienne Patterson