

Thursday, 9 August 2007

To Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

RE: Inquiry into the Appropriation (Northern Territory National Emergency Response) Bill (No. 2) 2007-2008

We are writing to you to express our grave concern about the proposed amendments to the Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Rights Act.

We are dedicated General Practitioners and clinicians working in remote Aboriginal communities, currently assisting the federal intervention in the provision of child health checks. We welcome these additional resources but encourage the taskforce to maintain a dialogue with us regarding the follow-up of these children and the sustainability of this program over future years.

We are, however, strongly opposed to the removal of the permit system.

We are not satisfied that there is any evidence linking Aboriginal control of land to child sexual abuse.

Further, we are not satisfied that removal of the permit system and opening access roads into Indigenous communities will have a positive impact on child sexual abuse.

On the contrary, removal of the permit system removes the only mechanism that Aboriginal communities have at their disposal to control who may visit and live on their lands. The simultaneous prohibition of alcohol and opening access roads to communities is likely to foster an illicit trade in alcohol and other drugs of addiction – both highlighted in the Little Children are Sacred report as important determinants of child sexual abuse. There is also the possibility that the removal of the permit system will increase access for non-Indigenous perpetrators of abuse.

A further unforeseen consequence of opening access roads will be the increased traffic on very remote and poorly maintained roads and in communities. This will inevitably result in a substantial increase in motor vehicle accidents and an unnecessary additional burden on small remote health centres poorly resourced to undertake this role.

Our position, opposing the removal of the permit system, is consistent with Northern Territory Police Union and importantly, Indigenous land owners throughout the Northern Territory.

We as medical practitioners and clinicians, have a primary moral and ethical obligation to ‘do no harm.’ We implore the members of the current parliament to adopt this principle when considering the proposed amendments to the Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Rights Act.

Yours sincerely

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Dr Jo Wright, FAPHM NT

Dr Jan Bowman, MBBS, FRACGP, MPH, FACHPm, GP, Nagalkanbuy Health Service, Galiwinku

Dr David Thomas, Menzies School of Health Research, Darwin

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Dr Paul Burgess, MBBS MPH, Maningrida Community Health Centre NT, GP registrar

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Dr Jacqueline Boyle, FRACOG, Specialist Outreach Services, NT

Ms Irene Fisher, CEO, Sunrise Health Service, NT

Annie Popelier, Maternal and Child Health Co-ordinator, Laynhapuy Homelands, NT

Kirsty Jones, Registered Nurse, Laynhapuy Homelands, NT

Gerard Groth, Acting Manager Registered Nurse, Laynhapuy Homelands, NT

Dr Sarah Chalmers, Medical Practitioner and Co-ordinator Chronic Disease, Laynhapuy Homelands, NT

Dr Tanya Davies, MBBS, FRACGP, FACRRM, Remote GP, Medical Advisor for Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the NT.