From: Linda Bennett

Sent: Friday, 10 August 2007 10:29 AM
To: Legal and Constitutional, Committee (SEN)
Subject: Submission to Senate Inquiry Committee re NT legislation

Dear Senators,

All parties need to heed the governments own report *Little Children are Sacred*, the first recommendation of which is sit down and talk to act. The report lays the pathway to successful action to prevent child abuse.

The Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the Northern Territory has produced an Emergency Response and Development Plan. It needs to be the starting point from here. We have all the tools we need to be able to protect children and communities. We need the will to use them, not a high level legislative response removed from the communities it effects. Organizations like the Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care and Aboriginal professionals like Professor Judy Atkinson have been telling you and us for years about what we need to do.

The new legislation will put us on a path back to the past. The experience of experts in the child abuse field, especially in relation to child sexual abuse, have told us that this approach will not work and is likely to jeopardise further prevention. In my experience as a social worker, I believe this to be true.

The bills remove the rights of Aboriginal land, remove Aboriginal communities' ability to have a say on who can come onto their land, and force Aboriginal boards of directors to accept outside Canberra representatives into their board rooms. 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. This smacks of "trickyness" as these moves come under the guise of child protection.

I hope you are able to listen to the aboriginal leaders who visited Canberra recently.

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

Sincerely, Linda Bennett