



7 August 2007

RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA CALLS FOR NON-URGENT ASPECTS OF LEGISLATION TO BE DEFERRED

Reconciliation Australia Co-Chairs Jackie Huggins and Mark Leibler have called on the Government this morning to extract and defer non-urgent elements of the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Bill. Speaking in support of the Aboriginal delegation from the Northern Territory, Ms Huggins and Mr Leibler emphasised that respectful consultation with people affected by legislation of this magnitude is an essential ingredient for success.

Six weeks into the intervention, Reconciliation Australia has asked that detailed evaluation of its early impact be released to reassure communities the plan is based on evidence of what's working. This would also help clarify which aspects of proposed legislation are needed to implement the emergency phase.

"We have no issue with the urgent passage of legislation genuinely required for the Government to take immediate action to protect children from abuse," said Mr Leibler. "But to the extent that aspects of the Bill deal with extraneous, non-emergency matters such as the permit system, customary law and land licensing, we strongly believe more time is needed to consult and communicate with affected communities."

Ms Huggins and Mr Leibler said Reconciliation Australia's response to aspects of the draft legislation was consistent with views stated previously, for example:

- On child abuse - we share the community's outrage at acts of criminal violence perpetrated against children and welcome the sense of urgency. Together with emergency responses, we remind Australians of successive calls for steady, consistent, properly resourced action. " (21 June 2007)
- On proposed changes to land rights legislation - "It is recognised throughout Australia that Indigenous people's relationship with land is of critical importance, culturally, socially and economically. Engagement with local communities is central to the policy positions of all parties, and must be reflected, and seen to be reflected, in policy implementation." (9 August 2006)

- On customary law in sentencing – “Customary law is a factor to consider like a range of other factors which are taken into account in the sentencing of any Australian. The issue is not whether these factors should be applied but that they must be applied appropriately.” (29 May 2006)

Reconciliation Australia's position always reinforces the fact that examples of Indigenous communities overcoming disadvantage and achieving success, in Australia and internationally, uniformly have Indigenous people leading and owning the ideas, and other parts of the community encouraging, enabling and supporting them over the long term.

ends

Reconciliation Australia Board

Ms Jackie Huggins AM (Co-Chair)

Mr Mark Leibler AC (Co-Chair)

The Hon Fred Chaney AO

Professor Mick Dodson AM

Mr Graham Evans AO

Ms Raymattja Marika

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NB: Directors are declining interviews on this release.