

**To:**

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
[Legcon.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:Legcon.sen@aph.gov.au)

Re. Inquiry into the Stolen Generation Compensation Bill 2008.

Dear Committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to feed in to this process.

By inviting comment and consultation, by asking the opinion of aboriginal people, this Inquiry is acting already in a healing way. In my limited experience, Indigenous people are very tired and extremely sensitive to white fellas telling them what they are and what they have to do. In addition I have three major comments to offer:

1. One more reason for a federal scheme of compensation is the same as one of the reasons given during the 1967 referendum – that states have shown consistently for over a century **they cannot be trusted** with this matter – that they will not overcome their property-capital bias to take a justice stance on land, money, compensation or even truth-telling. A federal scheme can force a new perspective, and federal parliament was given that responsibility for those very reasons in 1967.

My remaining two points are not about structures but about programmes. Programmes that address **disadvantage** are great but it is manifestly not adequate. That has been the perspective for a long time. I am at pains all the time, as **co-convenor of the Bringing Them Home Ctee in WA**, to try to ask non-indigenous people to think a little deeper and understand two critical things. If we keep missing them, we will keep missing the mark.

2. Aboriginal communities, thinking as a whole, live in a house of trauma. They have received trauma from all the things they have suffered and continue to suffer - promises broken, meaningless words, easy answers, patronizing programmes, teenage suicide, deaths in custody, stolen wages, massacres, sexual exploitation, street-level racism and institutionalised racism. They have suffered from naïve do-gooders as well as benefitting from those who do them good in partnership and respect. Destruction of families by removal policies has reaped the whirlwind of lost souls (addictions) and chaotic family dynamics. **Whatever the programme, we must operate as though with a people traumatized, not just with a race disadvantaged.** Consider the difference if it was you: if you got a bad cold and couldn't do your job one week, that is a disadvantage. Your boss would make adjustments to include your work and get you back up to speed next week. But if you had been beaten, your sister raped, your kids taken away somewhere you didn't know where and your property stolen and you couldn't go to work that week, that is completely another order of things. Your compassionate boss would have to allow you room to deal with the depth of the issues, at work, at the almost chaotic times at which these emotions and issues arise, or the boss will lose a very good worker. Removal Policy is now a long-standing deeply ingrained pattern of trauma which affects all the generations, like the sweeping effects of war on Vietnam Veterans and their families. We have to **get the depth of this issue clear**, and see how it affects at all times all the programmes of education, training and housing. This perspective must

influence the way that those programmes are carried out, and result in different approaches.

3. The other thing is **the question of viewpoint**. Westerners talk “facts, numbers, structures, control and paperwork” and fit a bit of values and spirituality onto the bottom corner of their page on a good day. They focus on the bits. Aboriginal culture works in the exact opposite way – it is all about ‘values and spirituality, relationships and yarning’ with a bit of money and numbers on the bottom of the page on a good day. They focus on the whole. When white government or business talk without respect or sensitivity to the differences, Indigenous leaders see them being preoccupied with petty and peripheral aspects of life and are missing the main game of the way their people are feeling. **We are not really on the same page**. Programmes must start where people are coming from, the obvious starting point for all education and communication. If I can learn to do something this, a great privilege for me as a white person with pioneering heritage in this great land, anyone can.

Until we implement these two things, we will never get anywhere.

I am ready to engage in further conversation about these things. Again, thank you for the opportunity.

Yours sincerely  
Dr Ian Robinson