Submission to Stronger Futures Inquiry

I believe the issues of concern which prompt the proposed legislation are arising because of the post-traumatic trans-generational stresses that affect all Aboriginal people, and because the coherence and social control exercised by functioning tribes has been destroyed. No help has been given so far to the task of rebuilding a coherent Aboriginal culture and society from which alone coherent persons and effective social social control could emerge. Until that happens, our help cannot be made use of.

The problems I'm concerned about apply equally to the current 'close the gap' health appeal, whose motives are fine except that again they express what I feel are unsuitable, white, mainstream misunderstandings of the process required. I believe these health problems and other behavioural problems continue because Aboriginal culture has been destroyed, and as a result individual Aboriginal people continue as deeply destroyed persons. Funds spent in vast amounts, based on our culture-blindness, have never hit the spot in the past and ***will not be made use of until the***

culture we have destroyed is rebuilt. This is something only they can do, but up to now we have never provided the *sanction*, let alone the help they now require in order to do that. So I do not support 'redoubled efforts' that I am sure will continue to fail as in the past. They are simply on the wrong track.

Most mainstream Australians, including eminent well-meaning people such as Roger Corbett - and of course Jenny Macklin – lack understanding of their own cultural blindness. The whole governmental and societal focus of concern about the Aboriginal situation is sadly defined only in terms of our mainstream cultural values and ideas of 'success'.. This has been a bipartisan failure: both sides of politics have consistently misunderstood.

Aboriginal people have always been in the same situation as we mainstreamers *would have been* had we ended up occupied by Japan after the last war. The invaders would have seen the situation in purely Japanese terms: ie., "Australians will all have to learn to speak (only) Japanese. They must face the reality that our Japanese culture must prevail. They must all adopt a Japanese lifestyle and Japanese religious beliefs. They must learn to do business like

we do. Their culture is obviously inferior. We must prohibit their normal cultural practices and they must adopt ours. *We* must be in charge. Only we can know what is best for them, " etc., "and we must make sure their health will stand up to international standards, so we're not embarrassed."

We 'mainstreamers' have applied ***this same approach*** to Aboriginal Australians ever since we got here, including ethnic cleansing wherever they were in our way. (When I worked up in Central Australia, I was upset to hear about ethnic cleansing that was occurring there right up until the 1930s, when I was born. Living Aboriginal people have those memories.) Lack of trust, and a certainty that we don't see things from their side, continues to today.

What do I recommend?

1. Accept that our unchanging, self-centred culture-blindness has directly caused the problem that persists to this day.

2. Decide to help the people construct together *their own,* modern, post-tribal culture that represents *their choice as to what they will find*

best for them at this point. If youth on outstations want to move into town for the excitement of our degenerate culture, we must offer help to them to explain our ways and help them fit those aspects that they want, manageably into their own redesigned but newly integrated and coherent social system. They originally had their own very strong traditions of tribal integration and social control, which in our total ignorance we have undermined and destroyed.

3. Acknowledge that, as with our mainstream culture of gambling and alcoholism, we have allowed our own people to market gambling, alcohol and drugs to Aboriginal people and develop a parallel class of Aborigines who also, like we do, exploit their own, ie., exploiting their weak people for the benefit of their own pockets, just as we do in the mainstream. We *do* force people to wear seat-belts, **but** *we continue to allow full-scale exploitation of gamblers, and those with alcohol problems*.

4. I feel we must devote resources to assist the

rebuilding of cohesive Aboriginal communities fortified by *their own* cohesive community culture. We must offer them the genuine space they need; and we must persevere with offering a genuinely respectful but authentic style of personal relationship, within which we can *encourage them to feel they are free to re-establish* ***rules for their own social cohesion and effective group functioning****. We have to enable them to build a level of trust in us that is currently non-existent.* [After all, we allow every immigrant group from Anglos to Vietnamese to maintain significant elements of their culture of origin, within the requirements for overall national Australian cohesion. What is our problem?]

Detribalised urban Aboriginal people today are riven by conflicts over how best to cope with our blindness and non-relationship. The contagion of our own virulent adversarialism has undermined them. They will need help to work through those conflicts within themselves and develop genuine leadership, with decision-making power that their community can support.

5. I feel certain that *this fostering work can be done only by helpers (caseworkers) who have the correct (ie., deeply unconscious and authentic) respect and personal authenticity required.* Mere bureaucratic regulations will be a disaster yet again. Unfortunately we lack a sufficiency of persons who can play this interpersonal role, even within our own over-bureaucratised mainstream culture, so a real effort to build up our skills in that area will be required, both for work with Aboriginal people and with our own. There *are* well-established methods for building these skills.

I believe the current Bill needs to be redesigned to focus on what I'm suggesting. I will be happy to discuss these matters further.

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