

Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia

Re: Stronger Futures Legislation

This submission to the Committee proposes further consultation in order to create real self determinism for the Aboriginal Communities and Town Camps of the Northern Territory. It expresses reservations about the proposed Stronger Futures legislation in its current form and the undue haste with which it is being implemented. It suggests an alternative path to a more effective result.

Australia is one of the most successful multicultural and multi faith societies on earth. It evolved this way by sharing understanding and respect for each others cultures across the various migrant races that make up the majority of our nation today. The understanding that has been sought and achieved with other contributing cultures does not yet exist with the first established culture of our continent. Aboriginal culture has existed in Australia for tens of thousands of years and maintained a form of governance and responsibility for the land and all that is connected with it for all this time. This culture is now damaged and under threat of being lost. The nature of this culture remains broadly unknown to most Australians.

Aboriginal Town Camps and Communities are in third world conditions. Change is necessary and urgent but needs the fundamental flaws that have created this situation to be examined and addressed. The situation in the outback communities of the Northern Territory reflects the lack of agreement that has existed between Aboriginal Australians and mainstream Australia since 1788. In this place and at this time we have an opportunity to take a step in the right direction to correct this.

Foremost in making human rights a reality for all Australians is to realize that Aboriginal people are the only race singled out in our constitution and laws to be treated differently. This singling out has continued in recent times with Hindmarsh Bridge and the NT Emergency Response being examples.

There are 200,000 people in the Northern Territory. 60,000 of these are Aboriginal and 60,000 more are in Government pay (including the armed forces). The amounts of money spent in this area are huge, yet with not enough effect. The amount of resources allocated and number of well meaning participants is clearly not the problem, the lack of result is. Traditionally mainstream Australia has taken a position of assumed greater knowledge and wisdom and treated Aboriginal people in a paternal manner. The failure to solve the issues addressed by the legislation are partly due to this. The treatment of the Stolen Generation is an example of this.

In order to genuinely resolve the issues that are being addressed by this legislation the following areas of concern must be addressed first and I suggest that the creation of meaningful consultative processes involving Aboriginal people together with existing government and non government agencies for each of these should be a prerequisite for any legislation in this area. Consultations are required to address:

1. An educational process that promotes all Australians learning the real history of our country, its real cultural origins and the core beliefs and traditional practices of Aboriginal people. The world's oldest civilization did not become that without real values and effective law.
2. An educational process that encourages all Aboriginal people to learn and take part in the preservation of their own laws and culture. A task force should be appointed to urgently assist Aboriginal people with the preservation of their culture and history before it is lost with the death of the elders.
3. An educational process that correctly targets the existing situation of illiteracy and lack of education and provides a correct gradient of learning so that all Aboriginal people are educated in the ways of mainstream society and language and are therefore capable of dealing with it on their own self determination. This should include a dictionary of Aboriginal usage of Australian English which is different in some key words from common Australian usage.
4. Aboriginal culture has its own structure of leadership. This structure is not well known and has been bypassed by mainstream society in its dealings with Aboriginal people. This structure needs to be understood and made known so that "representatives" of Aboriginal

people are truly representative of Aboriginal people and the outcomes of their negotiations become respected by all.

5. Corruption needs to be addressed. This is not a monopoly for any race but has been a major factor in waste of Government spending and the failure of practical help reaching those who need it. The amount spent and the results obtained are proof enough.
6. Human Rights need to be actively implemented with widespread education. Practical prohibitions of discrimination must be encouraged. The findings of the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner must be effectively addressed.
7. An agreement must be reached based on respect and historical truth replacing the false assumption of "*Terra Nullius Incognita*" for the current population of Australia for mutual sharing of our land. We are all here together sharing one "mother earth." What is needed is an acknowledgement of what has gone before and an agreement to go forward together. Wurindjeri elder Auntie Joy Wandin Murphy described the Welcome to Country as a long standing Australian tradition with a short break of 200 years. This ancient and workable philosophy of sharing can provide a basis for such an agreement.

Aboriginal values, culture and skills have a great deal to offer the broad community. The application of them saw Australia as a successful land of caring, responsible people for a very long time. Learning about Aboriginal values will bring a and understanding that self determination and responsibility are endemic to Aboriginal values as well as traditions of mainstream Australia.

The writer has spent many years engaged in human rights education, establishment of corporate, individual and group values and interaction with Aboriginal Australians. I ask that the legislation be withdrawn and that new legislation be developed based on further consultation. The fundamental right of all Australians, Aboriginal people included, is to be free and able to control their own lives.

Nigel Mannock