Dear Senators,

I wish to make a submission to the Senate Inquiry into Income Management and the NT Intervention.

In the past five years I have lived and work in Aboriginal communities as a Men's Health and Mental Health Manager. I am currently employed as an Aboriginal Advisor in Mental Health.

At the time that NT Intervention was rolled out I was living at Galiwinku one of the largest Aboriginal Communities in Australia. My role as the Manager of Mental Health for the community I attended to and was consulted on all matters Mental Health. The Federal Intervention caused anxiety and apprehension amongst the community as people understood that there were people coming to examine their children for being sexually abused. As teams were flown in from other parts of Australia to perform health checks the community were understandably reluctant to bring their children to be examined. Over time as some health checks were achieved by brave community members. Word spread that it was safe and others followed bringing their children in for health checks. My point in this illustration is that people were terrified as they had not be properly informed in their own language of the true intention of the health checks. Word had spread quickly from reports in the media that the government were coming to find paedophiles. Only local relationships were able to dispel this theory and engage people with the practitioners that were flown in with no cultural training or knowledge of the communities they were to be servicing. Police were introduced into this community for the first time in history. Community controlled councils were forced to shut down and were replaced by non-Aboriginal business managers. From a mental health perspective I was dealing daily with people who were terrified that they had no control.

I believe with the continued racist legislation that is proposed under the banner of 'Stronger Futures' Aboriginal people will continue to be terrified and be feeling completely overwhelmed and hopeless.

As a mental health clinician I feel that the suspension of income support payments in response to poor attendance can only further exacerbate the disadvantage that Aboriginal people suffer. When you do not have adequate services to support people with their physical and mental health issues why should they be punished if they do not comply with the dominant culture's expectations regarding getting their children to school? The school attendance criteria under the ECED strategy may have a detrimental effect on those parents who are trying to send their kids to school but are losing the battle due to circumstances beyond their control. This legislation does not recognize that by suspending payments this creates a cycle of further debt, violence, humbug and poverty.

With regard to alcohol and substance abuse, will income management be applied equally to Aboriginal and non Aboriginal Australians across the entire Northern Territory and Australia? If not the racism implied in this measure will bring further discredit to Australia on the international stage.

Drug and alcohol abuse in Aboriginal communities are the result of 200 years of dispossession and disempowerment. Decades of research have shown that paternalistic approaches increase disempowerment. There are many Aboriginal people who do manage to care for their families responsibly in spite of extremely difficult circumstances. Inevitably

they will also be stigmatised by these initiatives. A quick fix punitive approach is not the answer. Only patient, well funded, culturally competent support from appropriate services working in partnership with Aboriginal communities can turn the lives of these families around.

This legislation fails to suggest what support mechanisms and programs will be introduced for families on these outstations/homelands/town camps to assist in working through these critical issues and as always I often see these initiatives as being band-aids on previous policy processes that have clearly failed in the past.

The persecution of Aboriginal people under the Intervention has had horrendous consequences. Reported rates of attempted suicide and self-harm have more than doubled (Closing the Gap Monitoring Report). Indigenous incarceration has increased by 40 per cent.

I have seen the many negative effects first hand that people have endured through the NTER. I believe that the 'Stronger Futures' legislation will plunge Aboriginal morale and will to a new low and if this is the case all of those that are in support of it will be aiding in this tragedy.

A colleague of mine shared with me a guide on how to conduct meaningful development.

The underlying principles of a rights based approach to development include:

- Active, free and meaningful participation in development;
- Self-determination and full sovereignty over natural wealth and resources;
- Equality, non-discrimination and fair distribution of the benefits of development;
- Rule of law and good governance;
- Social Justice and Equity;
- Special attention to disadvantaged groups- the poor; women; indigenous peoples; etc.

The only point that this legislation actually achieves is the special attention to disadvantaged groups. However the special attention that I believe is intended is special attention in a positive way not in a way that is statistically flawed and disempowering.

I have talked to many Aboriginal people including community leaders in Arnhem Land, Central Australia and Victoria and not one of them support the stronger futures legislation. I believe that the consultations for this legislation were brief and not at all translated into local language.

My hope is the Stronger Futures legislation will be rejected and that Aboriginal people of Australia will be supported with respect and dignity.

Kind regards,

Bramwell Morton