To whom it may concern,

I am writing to you to give my opinion in regards to the **Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011 and two related bills.**

Where do I begin?! I am a woman of many words but I am almost rendered speechless at the idea that I even need to make this submission. I have always been against the Northern Territory Intervention and its related legislation. However my passion to stop the intervention was ignited after doing a unit at Victoria University called "Australian Indigenous Knowledge and Understanding", a subject which I strongly suggest each and every person involved in making Aboriginal policy take.

During this unit we watched a film titled "Our Generation" this made me reflect upon a statistic I heard a while ago. When the intervention HAPPENED it had just over 40% public support, at present gay marriage has over 60% public support…which of those two things was implemented in Australia? We are supposed to live in a "democratic" society but how can that be so when our government so blatantly disregards what its people are telling them what they want?

Also during this unit we watched Chris Graham's presentation called "The lie that built the Northern Territory Intervention" (2010). As mentioned previously I have always been against the intervention, but I had never really seen any of the media prior to it and I also had no idea that the lies ran so deep, it's shocking.

During Chris' presentation he was discussing how the "paedophile" the intervention centred around was prescribed Viagra by Doctors (including the Doctor accusing the other men in the community of condoning the man's behaviour) for 2 and a half years, even after the man disclosing that he was using it to abuse young women. Chris questioned what makes a better story: the failing health system or the "dirty Aborigine"? Chris is right, and I was wondering why? I think for the media to talk about the failing health system (which is happening all over Australia) is in the "too hard" basket (and of course wouldn't get as many ratings!) so it's easier to talk about the "Aboriginal problem" and send in the troops to sort it out! I think that's why so many issues do not get resolved in Australia, because the government or the media aren't willing to have any "real" conversations about it! Its things like this that make me feel not so proud to be Australian.

The Doctor who prescribed the man Viagra (including for 8 months after he had written in his own notes that the man was using the drug to abuse women) is still a Doctor and has received no ramifications. At present I am studying Social Work at Victoria University and Just like Doctors, Social Workers have a code of ethics we are expected to adhere to. The Australian Association of Social Worker's code of ethics is not prescriptive to every situation and some issues will be complex, but I could never imagine so blatantly disobeying the code of ethics. This Doctor has disobeyed his code of ethics in several ways, and has gotten away with it. Not all Doctors behave in such ways I know but thinking about that really makes me worry about what kind of people they are entrusting with the Australian public's health.

Whenever I hear the past policies in relation to Aboriginal's they seem absurd but this isn't 1950's colonial Australia, it's happening right now! With such stories as this one and the continued intervention, it's no wonder the general public have such a negative opinion of Aboriginal people.

I could say so much more about the above topics, but I'll leave it at that and continue with my thoughts on the actual policy. Reading through the "Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011; Second Reading" (Macklin, 2011), I wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry. The policy just seems like Ludacris (to put it politely).When I first started reading I thought "yes! Finally! The Government is finally going to change their approach and we will see real change for the Aboriginal people". That feeling did not last long.

The speech mentions that "There have been real and positive improvements over the last three years". I'm just wondering where exactly these improvements are? Please watch "Our Generation" before you even try to answer that question.

It goes on to say that "the introduction of the basics card has been positive, showing that income management is a useful tool for people", again I'm wondering how this can be true when the basics card makes it harder for Aboriginal people to access the things they need, for example the card only being able to be used in the main towns which for some are hours away from where they reside.

When I read "More than 350 new houses have been built and another 275 are underway. More than 1,800 rebuilds and refurbishments of houses are also complete" again I reflected on the images seen in "Our Generation". The scene that stood out the most was an Aboriginal woman standing in the street saying "to my left you have the houses for government employees, to my right you have the houses for the teachers and here we are in the middle, still waiting". I know that SOME houses have been built, and I do acknowledge that but definitely not the number of houses promised, and definitely not enough. Also there are complaints that even when houses are built for Aboriginal people they do not use them, however the houses are being built for the nuclear family structure and do not take into account the notion of Aboriginal kinship arrangements.

Macklin's bill goes on to state that "Some children are still not receiving proper care, and that is completely unacceptable". This I am in agreeance with, BUT the child abuse in the Northern Territory is not as exacerbated as the media portrays and this issue is not unique to Aboriginal people. Child abuse is an issue that simply must be tackled holistically, Australia wide. Child abuse does not just happen in Aboriginal communities and isn't acceptable in ANY community.

Ms Macklin mentions "The barriers people described to us in this consultation were about the lack of services; yes, that is true", my question is: so why not focus on THAT instead of stricter alcohol laws?!. Macklin also mentions that over 100 Aboriginal communities were consulted on this, I am sceptical of this, the "Lateline" story which prompted the "Little children are sacred" report (which in turn prompted the Northern Territory Intervention) also said they had consulted with communities, and that turned out to be a blatant lie…

Apparently "This bill strengthens the ability of communities to take that control", again I question how this is so when Aboriginal alcohol plans must meet particular criteria and be approved by government?!

There is A LOT more I could say on this but I will sum up by saying that at best this policy is considerably flawed, I do not agree with the policy and I think despite the promise to "[Build]A relationship built on respect for Australia's first peoples, for their custodianship of the land, for their culture and for their ongoing contributions to our shared nation…A respect that is about much more than sentiment. It is about the approach we take to our work, and the approach we take to working together", the policy fails to deliver. Until Aboriginal people are genuinely consulted, listened to and supported (in terms of services, funding, suitable infrastructure, etc.) I believe that things will not change. I would also just like to say that I am saying all this as a third generation Australian born non-indigenous white woman, the only reason I say this is because it seems to matter. It is my hope that if enough people including non-Aboriginal people speak out then things will change. I do have hope things can change, the Australian government just needs to listen to its people…all of its people.

References:

Graham, C 2010, *Racism in the media: the lie that built the Northern Territory Intervention,* online video, Viewed 12th January 2012, < http://vimeo.com/14734614>.

Macklin, J 2011, *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011; Second Reading,* Viewed 30th January 2012, < http://www.openaustralia.org/debate/?id=2011-11-23.16.1>.

Our generation, DVD, 2011 Australia.