To the Senate Community Affairs Committee,

Regarding the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011

From: Barbara Hadkinson: Founder (1994) and Member of *'Current Issues in Indigenous Affairs' group, U3A Hawthorn*

Address:

Submission opposing the proposed Stronger Futures legislation.

I concur with the concerns expressed by some community groups and national organisations, that the legislation does not reflect the views expressed by communities during the Stronger Futures consultations, and that it will further embed the disempowerment and discrimination that was begun under the Northern Territory Intervention.

My observations over the last 20 plus years of interest in Indigenous Issues, after having spent 7 years working in Papua New Guinea in 1960-70s, is that Governments most often up till now at least, proceed with decisions that fit in with their own mindset and the perceived limitations for them. They rarely grasp the implications of what people are saying, from the people's point of view.

One way past this is to follow the recommendation in the ANTaR statement: "Cooperation not intervention: a call for a new direction in the Northern Territory" 23rd November, 2011. It states:

Policies should be based on what communities and governments know actually works on the ground.

In support of my above observations I take as an example this extract from the address of Don Palmer of Malpa to the Red Cross Society in the Henry Dunant Lecture 1, 2011

> Indigenous people are not simply sitting around waiting for help from Canberra. Given the chance they will do remarkable things.
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> In 1995 someone decided to actually implement a comprehensive, carefully conceived health initiative. The beneficiaries were to be the Tiwi Islands. The health status of the people there was as poor as existed anywhere.
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> This time the plan was to involve the community in the design and running of the scheme. The program was a carefully conceived Co-ordinated Care Trial. The minister announced that "This trial will have a whole of community health approach. Public health and health promotion and education programs will play an important role in improving health outcomes for the Tiwi".
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> The result in three short years was astonishing. Incidence of kidney failure reduced by about 50%. Heart disease by even more. Diabetes – as high as afflicting 80% of some Indigenous communities, slashed. By every measure things had dramatically improved. The glossy government brochure boasting of the success even said that several millions of dollars in health costs had been saved! A resounding success.
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> You probably know by now that this will not end happily. The government then decided not to fund the Trial any further. Within a short time all the health statistics were back to where they were. The people had risen to the challenge and the opportunity. Would they ever bother to do so again? Their resilience is extraordinary, but it has limits. Now anyone involved in this knows that the problems are enormous.

Why cancel projects that are working and give a lead as to how to consult constructively?

ANTaR observes also:

The strong message from recent consultations with Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory is that people want reliable services, schools and jobs in their own communities, not that they think simplistic 'get tough' policies are the answer.

I ask that the legislation be withdrawn and that an alternative policy is developed, based on genuine consultation, community empowerment, the respect of Aboriginal culture, lands and languages, and the fundamental right of Aboriginal people to be able to control their own lives.

Thank you,

Barbara Hadkinson

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