David Blackman
Linguist
Australian Society for Indigenous Languages (AuSIL)
www.ausil.org.au

I wish to make a submission to the Committee to express my opposition to the proposed Stronger Futures legislation.

I have been working with Aboriginal people in Central Australia for 20 years, including 12 years of living and working in a remote Aboriginal community. I speak the Alyawarr language, and (with two colleagues) am in the process of publishing a comprehensive dictionary of the language.

I am constantly disgusted at the arrogance of policy makers, at both the Territory and Federal levels, which assumes they know best, and that European solutions to Aboriginal issues must be the only way to go. I have sat in on many 'consultation' meetings, where Aboriginal people were basically told what would happen, and they were expected to agree. No attempt was ever made to actually present the information in the language of the people.

Many Aboriginal people speak English to some degree, but they speak a form of English that is very different to 'standard' English. Often they use the same words to mean different things. The frequency of miscommunication when using English is very high, even when talking with people who live in towns.

Why do governments refuse to listen to experienced people who live and work where the needs are? Why is their knowledge and expertise ignored? I and my colleagues have been battling this attitude for years. We can tell you what policies have not worked in the past, yet failed policies continue to be resurrected, and vast sums of taxpayers' money continue to be wasted.

I concur with the concerns expressed by 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.

I ask that the legislation be withdrawn and that an alternative policy is developed, based on genuine consultation **in local languages**, the respect of Aboriginal culture, lands and languages, and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.