

Committee Secretary

Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs

Submission to Senate Inquiry

Re Proposed Extension of the Northern Territory Intervention

Whilst we all want to improve the welfare of indigenous Australians and close the gap between them and non-indigenous Australians it is not appropriate to extend the intervention, particularly by imposing punitive conditions and management of communities from external sources.

This is very pertinent with regard to the discrimination (see UN Declaration of Human Rights), the low esteem and disempowerment the present system creates with members of all communities that are required to live with these conditions placed on them by external authorities.

It is noted that removal of self management rights and management of income, as proposed, has not been shown statistically, to improve the welfare of indigenous communities, particularly with regard to the rate of imprisonment and school non-attendance, when analysing Australian and overseas experience.

The Government is intending to make appropriate funds available, and this intention is welcomed, but this money could be more effectively spent by a process that :

- Extends the consultations to the majority of communities (not the few that have been implemented in the review), imparting the notion that the intention is to 'work with' the communities not 'against' them.
- Listening to and taking up the suggestions of the elders who are representatives of the various communities, ignoring pre-conceived ideas that punitive action is necessary.
- Taking greater note of the suggestions made at some of the consultations, such as, inclusion of Aboriginal culture in the education programs, involvement of parents and elders, improving the quality of teachers, a more consistent pastoral and understanding approach to individuals in the communities.
- Recognising that an 'across the board' approach cannot be applied to all communities because each have different cultural practises, standards and needs with different issues with different solutions.

This will require additional cost, but if started, will see gradual improvement over time, compared with lack of improvement that has occurred with the present approach, the trials being implemented and the many approaches that have been in place prior to 2001.

The solution is to restore the rights of indigenous people and withdrawing the legislation proposed, and enabling them the right to self determination with the provision of appropriate and varying support from Government similar to non-indigenous Australians.

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