To the Senate Community Affairs Committee regarding the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011.

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

I begin by referring to Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle – "Little Children are Sacred', Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse 2007. It opens with the following recommendation:

In the first recommendation, we have specifically referred to the critical importance of governments committing to genuine consultation with Aboriginal people in designing initiatives for Aboriginal communities, whether these be in remote, regional or urban settings.

It continues:

We have been conscious throughout our enquiries of the need for that consultation and for Aboriginal people to be involved. Mr Fred Chaney, in retiring from the National Native Title Tribunal, was asked why successive governments have failed so comprehensively to turn the story of Aboriginal deprivation around. He was being interviewed on the ABC's 7.30 Report on 19 April 2007 and replied:

> *• And one of the things I think we should have learned by now is that you can't solve these things by centralised bureaucratic direction. You can only educate children in a school at the place where they live. You can only give people jobs or get people into employment person by person. And I think my own view now is that the lesson we've learned is that you need locally based action, local resourcing, local control to really make changes.*
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> *• But I think governments persist in thinking you can direct from Canberra, you can direct from Perth or Sydney or Melbourne, that you can have programs that run out into communities that aren't owned by those communities, that aren't locally controlled and managed, and I think surely that is a thing we should know doesn't work.*
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> *• So I am very much in favour of a model which I suppose builds local control in communities as the best of those Native Title agreements do, as has been done in the Argyle Diamond Mine Agreement, as is being done in Kununurra. Not central bureaucracies trying to run things in Aboriginal communities. That doesn't work.*
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> *• They're locked into systems which require central accounting, which require centralised rules and regulations. They're not locally tailored. The great thing about working with a mining company in an Aboriginal community is that the mining company has the flexibility to manage towards outcomes locally with that community.*
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> *• The great thing about the education projects in which I'm involved is that we can manage locally for the outcomes that we want to achieve locally. Once you try and do it by remote control, through visiting ministers and visiting bureaucrats fly in, fly out – forget it.*

The thrust of our recommendations, which are designed to advise the Northern Territory Government on how it can help support communities to effectively prevent and tackle child sexual abuse, is for there to be consultation with, and ownership by the communities, of those solutions.

This recommendation clearly highlights the need for genuine Indigenous community consultation, engagement and empowerment, that which I feel is lacking in both the current policy, and the proposed Stronger Futures legislation. The Report noted above was used to invoke the hastily prepared intervention policy, yet this recommendation, the first and most poignant, was evidently overlooked in the Federal Governments response. Let us not make this mistake again.

I also concur with the concerns expressed by community groups and national organisations in their Joint Statement: Cooperation not Intervention - A call fo a new direction in the Northern Territory , 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, 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.

Please note the opinion expressed above is that of my own and not representative of the organisation I am affiliated with.

Russell Shields