SUBMISSION TO THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT OF AUSTRALIA

STRONGER FUTURES IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

For a long time I have been observing from a distance the people of Yuendumu since I worked there as a graduate of the University of Adelaide in 1970 on a project investigating infant mortality rates. I have been back twice: in 1975 and in 2002. Like many other Australians, I have pondered deeply the way to progress in living peaceably and with dignity beside the Aboriginal population.

It is my considered and profoundly held opinion that the Aboriginal people of Australia must be allowed to determine their own future and make their own decisions and be supported in this.

There are now enough Aboriginal people educated and aware of their rights, the language and culture of their own people and those of the wider Australia for them to be able to lead the way for their people. The Australian government must do what it can to support these people to become strong leaders in their own communities and to work within those communities.

Any interventions that remove Aboriginal people's rights to self-determination must be vigorously rejected. Such policies only prolong the dependency of the Aboriginal people and deny their future as strong and independently successful communities.

Aboriginal people must be listened to in each community and community development workers need to assist natural leaders to get their community's support. The many advances that have already taken place (e.g., women's refuges, night buses that pick up the needy, aged care facilities, art centres and so on) must be honoured and celebrated. Expression through the arts must be encouraged.

There will always be setbacks and people who point to them as evidence that the Aboriginal people must be governed by other outsiders, but they must be resisted.

We must support Aboriginal communities to find their own ways.

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