STRONGER FUTURES IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY BILL 2011 – Senate Committee Submission

January 2011

The major issues with the proposed legislation are that:

- It proposes to continue the Intervention for a further 10 years, even though there is clear evidence that Intervention that started in 2007 has caused anger, frustration and anxiety in many communities, mainly because it was thrust on communities without any proper consultation, has provided little in the way of real benefits to many remote Aboriginal people and communities, and has led to systematic disempowerment of these communities.
- It clearly fails to take into proper account what was said by the people in the 2011 consultations and most importantly that these 2011 consultations did not meet with the Elders (born leaders) of the remote communities in spite of numerous calls for this to take place.

This submission looks specifically at Section 4 of the legislation and shows that it only addresses one aspect of this most critical issue in spite of the government having done detailed investigation on it

Section 4 - Food Security – Community Stores Licensing

The "Stronger Futures legislation" does not address food security and therefore this section must be withdrawn or comprehensively reworked.

The reason for this becomes obvious when the narrowness of this section of the proposed legislation is compared with the breadth of definition such as put forward by the Australian Institute of Family Studies – Communities and Families Clearing House Australia (an Australian Government department) in a document titled "Food insecurity in Australia: What is it, who experiences it and how can child and family services support families experiencing it?" http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/pubs/sheets/ps/ps9.html, that states in part :

> *"Whereas food security is broadly defined as "access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life" (Radimer, 2002), food insecurity exists "whenever the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the ability to acquire acceptable food in socially acceptable ways is limited or uncertain" (Radimer, 2002). There are three key components of food security (World Health Organization, 2011):*
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> *1. Food access: the capacity to acquire and consume a nutritious diet, including:*
>
> - *the ability to buy and transport food;*
> - *home storage, preparation and cooking facilities;*
> - *knowledge and skills to make appropriate choices;*
> - *and time and mobility to shop for and prepare food.*
>
> *2. Food availability: the supply of food within a community affecting food security of individuals, households or an entire population, specifically:*
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> - *location of food outlets;*
> - *availability of food within stores; and*
> - *price, quality and variety of available food (Nolan, Rickard-Bell, Mohsin, & Williams, 2006).*
>
> *3. Food use: the appropriate use of food based on knowledge of basic nutrition and care.*[1]

- *There are three different "levels" of food security (see Figure 1, based upon Burns, 2004):*
  - *secure;*
  - *insecure but without hunger - where there may be anxiety or uncertainty about access to food or inappropriate use of food (i.e., poor nutritional quality) but regular consumption of food occurs; and*
  - *insecure with extreme hunger - where meals are often missed or inadequate (Burns, 2004).*

Withdrawal of this section of the proposed legislation is also supported because it has largely ignored a wide body of research and inputs from consultations that provide a comprehensive blueprint for achieving food security, or eliminating food insecurity, as defined above. Perhaps the most compelling example of this failing is the report titled "Everybody's Business Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Community Stores", http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/atsia/communitystores/report/Everybody's%20Business%20Report.pdf published in November 2009 by the Government's own House of Representatives Committee. The Committee received 112 submissions from a wide range of sources including Commonwealth, state and territory government departments, store owners, store managers, freight providers, health experts and providers, individuals living in remote Indigenous communities, academics, and Indigenous representative organisations. They also conducted 28 public hearings in Canberra, Darwin, Alice Springs, Broome and in remote areas of the Northern Territory, Queensland and South Australia. The committee synthesized the findings into thirty three recommendations that provide both a blueprint to achieve food security as well as the flexibilities to work with and empower individual remote communities. The current legislation relates to only three of these thirty three recommendations. A similar comprehensive approach is provided in the South Australian government's strategic plan for the APY Lands in remote SA called "Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands - Food Security Strategic Plan - 2011 – 2016" http://www.premcab.sa.gov.au/pdf/APY_Food_Security_Plan.pdf This initiative comes out of COAG which is under the umbrella of the Australian Government. This raises the question why the legislation has done this and therefore condemned the likelihood of food security to almost certain failure?

Some of the key elements of food security recommendations of the report "Everybody's Business Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Community Stores" are listed below, as an illustration of the critical elements of food security that have been ignored in the Stronger Futures legislation:

- Extensive use of nutritionists and nutrition education programs linked to the remote community store system.
- Incentive schemes to sell healthy produce.
- Government assistance for remote community stores to set up a healthy store policy.
- Fund the installation and training to use Remote Indigenous Stores and Takeaways (RIST) or similar point-of-sale monitoring tool as there is widespread evidence for its value in monitoring community store sales performance.

- Make available in all remote community stores a system similar to the FOODcard (a voluntary card that assists with food budgeting) established by the Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation.
- Investigate and develop the facilitation of training of Indigenous staff living in remote communities to store management levels, and the certification of in-store training of skills such as health promotion and food supply and storage.
- Establish a national remote Indigenous food supply chain coordination office that can educate about and facilitate cooperative arrangements that include transparent cross subsidisation models if appropriate, to reduce the cost of healthy food supply to remote communities.
- Consider freight subsidies for fresh food transportation to the Torres Strait
- Invest in a store infrastructure fund that will in turn invest in delivery, refrigeration and storage facilities that will support the supply of fresh and healthy produce to Indigenous communities. This can also cut wastage which is another factor in high costs of healthy foods.
- Where it is demonstrated that long term sustainability can be attained, support community garden, traditional food and farming projects in remote Indigenous communities for the local production of food, particularly in schools.
- Examine ways to facilitate remote Indigenous communities undertaking collaborative arrangements with stores to distribute and /or sell locally grown or harvested produce in partnerships with local food production and harvest industries. These last two can also potentially reduce food costs and create further employment.
- Work with the Australian Bankers Association to investigate ATM fees and investigate mechanisms to lower or waive financial fees and charges for Indigenous people in remote communities.

Therefore this section of "Stronger Futures" legislation cannot achieve food security and should be withdrawn and re developed.

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