

14/02/14

Dr Bill Pender
Committee Secretary
Joint Select Committee on North Australia
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Email: jscna@aph.gov.au

To Joint Select Committee on North Australia,

The Australian government cannot morally or practically engage in the development of Northern Australia without treaties with First Nations, in particular the First Nations of my region, Arnhem Land. Morally because there is currently no social contract for the Australian Government to do so, and thereby practically, because in the hearts of the people the Australian Government has no real authority enabling them to encourage behavior that will amount to productivity- no one will be listening. This applies to State and Territory governments also.

Furthermore, historically the occupation of lands in Australia by Second Peoples was propelled by the economic concerns of a few, who successfully lobbied the governments of their time to enforce their claims for natural resources over and above the legitimate ownership rights, and lives, of First Australians. If the Australian government does not want to continue this trend they must negotiate treaties with the political leadership of the First Nations in the North of this continent. By doing so the modes and means of trade partnership can then be negotiated.

Finally, because of the differences in language, law, and institutional systems between Australian and First Nation societies, protections and advantages must be established for the citizens of First Nations to have fair participation in the developing economy of the north. However it is pointless to propose this step if such measures are to be encoded and administered by the Australian, State or Territory governments alone. This is because these governments, being elected by mostly Southerners (or Darwin residents in the case of the NT) and at the same time being beneficiaries of tax revenue, have a deep conflict of interest when being asked concurrently to be benevolent protectors of economic rights for indigenous societies. As it is now, exploitation of the people and land of the north would be an insurmountable temptation. Treaties with the First Nations would allow indigenous authorities and political leaders to balance the needs of the economy, while also protecting the wellbeing of the people that live in these places- including Second Peoples.

The only strategy that will end in a net benefit for society in the north of Australia is to pursue treaties with the First Nations. Despite my negative rendering of this point, I believe such a pursuit would be positive, and humanizing for all involved.

Sincerely

Kendall Trudgen
Community Development Worker
Mediator