

APPENDIX III

1. Letter from Senator J. Coulter
2. Letter from Mr D. Abbott, Secretary, Select Committee on the Administration of Aboriginal Affairs



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA · THE SENATE

John R. Coulter

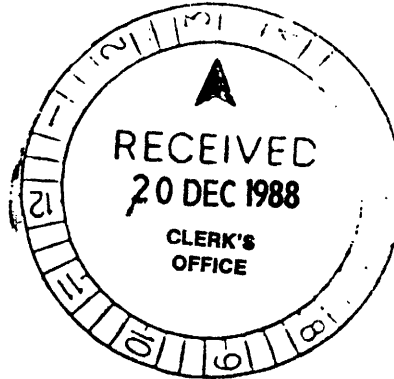
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December 20, 1988

Senator Pat Giles
Committee of Privileges
Australian Senate
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Senator Giles

In answer to your letter of 19 December, 1988, I can provide the following information.

Late in the afternoon of 1 September I was rung by Mr Norman Johnson who spoke at length about ATSIC. He expressed a view in strong support of ATSIC and was aware that I had successfully moved that ATSIC lie before the Senate for six months and that I had supported the Opposition's successful motion to appoint a Senate Committee to consider the ATSIC legislation.

He telephoned from Canberra and said 'they' had just arrived. The conversation continued for about an hour. He urged me to abandon the Committee and support rapid passage of the ATSIC Bill. In the course of the conversation he said he was likely to become a Regional Manager under ATSIC administering a budget of \$5 million, a matter I questioned him about in committee the next day, when he explained he would rather administer such a budget under direction from an elected Aboriginal Regional Council, than, as now, under direction from DAA.

After this long conversation Mr Ray Robinson came to the telephone and continued very strongly to urge support for immediate passage of the ATSIC Bill. At one stage he threatened that next day they, Robinson, Johnson and McCarthy would demonstrate against the Australian Democrats outside Parliament House during during which they would burn their membership cards. As far as I am aware, Robinson has never been a member of the Australian Democrats.

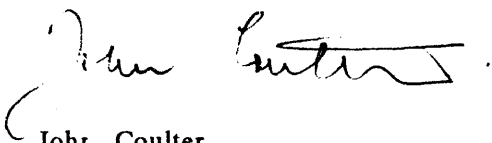
I can not be certain whether it was Robinson or Johnson to whom I said they should appear before the Committee -- I think it was Johnson. I cannot say whether they were aware of the sitting of the Committee next day before this telephone conversation. When I mentioned the Committee I was told they were returning to Queensland by air at 4 o'clock the next day. I did suggest they contact Derek Abbott, secretary to the Senate Committee. At no stage did I meet with Johnson, Robinson or McCarthy on 1 September. The whole interchange occurred on the telephone.

Next day when I went to the Committee Room for the hearing I saw Robinson outside the Committee Room. He is unmistakable. I think Johnson and/or McCarthy were with him but I can not be sure. I did not make and keep notes of these events at the time thinking them not especially important. Robinson was not alone. Later that day Mrs Shirley McPherson gave evidence and indicated she was aware of Robinson outside the Committee Room.

All three appeared as witnesses before the Committee on the afternoon of 2 September and were still before the Committee when I left at approximately 4:10pm to catch the 425/50 planes to Adelaide. I thought this strange at the time as I remember quite clearly being told the night before that they were returning to Queensland on a four o'clock flight.

Thus I can confirm that I did tell Mr Johnson of the meeting of the Committee on 2 September but I cannot say whether it was Mr Johnson's first knowledge of that meeting. I was told that they had just arrived when they telephoned on the late afternoon of 1 September and I was told they were departing at four o'clock the next day. Robinson and possibly Johnson and McCarthy were outside the Meeting Room at the start of the hearing and all were with the Committee for several hours in the afternoon -- continuing after four o'clock. I cannot say whether they stayed outside the Committee Room between the start of the hearing and when they were called. I believe from what Mrs McPherson said, one or more of them were there some of this time.

Yours sincerely



John Coulter
Senator for South Australia
Australian Democrats



THE SENATE

CANBERRA, A.C.T.

C/489

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

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13 January 1988

Miss A. Lynch
Secretary
Committee of Privileges
The Senate
Parliament House
CANBERRA A.C.T. 2600

Dear Miss Lynch,

I refer to your letter of 19 December regarding the appearance of certain witnesses before this Committee.

Messrs Robinson, Johnson and McCarthy telephoned my office at approximately 5.50pm on the evening of Thursday 1 September 1988. They spoke only to my secretary and told her that they were coming to Parliament House immediately and wished to speak to me about the work of this Committee.

They arrived at approximately 6.20pm and I met them at the security desk at the Senate entrance. We then went to Senate Committee Room 18. I explained to them what the Committee was inquiring into, how it conducted its business and what the program of the meeting on Friday 2 September 1988 was. During this discussion the question of their appearance before the Committee was raised.

My recollection of the discussion (I made no written notes) is that Mr Robinson raised the question of him and his colleagues appearing before the Committee on the following day. I explained that I had no authority to invite them to appear; that was a matter for the Committee members to decide. I also pointed out that the Committee already had a very full program for the following day. However, I undertook to approach the Committee's Chairman, Senator McMullan, and ask him if he would be prepared to fit the group into the program for that day. They indicated that they would attend the hearings and I said that I would advise them as to whether the Committee would hear them.

I then showed them the room where the 2 September meeting was to be held and escorted them back to the Senate entrance at approximately 7.05pm.

On September 2 the Committee met in public for a short time and was then in-camera until 1.00pm. Thus I am not aware of when Messrs Robinson, McCarthy and Johnson arrived at the Committee Room. However I did advise them at some stage during the day that the Committee would hear them.

I have no recollection of the precise wording of any conversations I had with Messrs Robinson, McCarthy and Johnson or that day. The statement "... approached the three of us..." should be read in the context of the previous evening's discussion where they had asked to appear and I had undertaken to approach the Chairman to see if the Committee would accommodate them. As quoted in your letter the statement suggests that I had taken the initiative in inviting the three person to appear which was not the case.

I had had no prior contact with any of the three person involved prior to the evening of 1 September 1988. The Committee met no travel or accommodation expenses with regard to their appearance.

Yours sincerely,



Derek Abbott
Secretary

Committee on Aboriginal Affairs