

Subject: Stronger Futures plus 2 related bills

To the Senate Committee

Dear Senators

I am particularly intrigued by the “motives” behind this “Stronger Futures” legislation, and wonder about the assumptions behind such evident paternalism.

The focus appears to be on some mythical perfect service system, into which “Stronger Futures” wants to force indigenous Australians to better fit. Little regard appears to have been given to adapting such service systems to better accommodate the needs of the target group. It seems that most of the concepts being introduced by this legislation are not evidence based, indeed, trials of such measures have all been unsatisfactory, and dare I suggest, worse than doing nothing, not that I am advocating doing nothing.

The role of Governments in the dispossession of culture, property and rights of indigenous Australians seems to have been whitewashed from the thinking of those entrusted to develop this new legislation.

Rather than dwell on all of the shortcomings of the measures being proposed, I offer a question and answer, as per the Terms of this Inquiry:

The Australian Government’s School Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM) trial, parents receiving Australian Government income support payments
Issues for discussion

What are the key factors in getting children and young people in remote communities to go to school regularly?

Making schools a place where children want to go, and where parents want them to go. Unless the intent is forced assimilation, contrary to the Government’s obligations under a number of International Agreements to which it is a signatory.

How can we improve educational outcomes of young people in remote communities?

Ensuring that education is culturally appropriate, and provided in a safe learning environment would better engage students.

What can the Government do to encourage this, for example through links to welfare payments?

There is no nexus implied nor intended between welfare payments, (social security) as prescribed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with schooling, other than they both be a good idea. Attempts to negatively sanction parents is a breach of the social contract and has been both counter productive and a policy failure wherever it has been trialled. Threats of removing financial support to parents may be punishing the victim. It’s not as if schools are perfect. Bullying occurs between children in many schools, and by some staff in most. That parents may feel it safer and more supportive for their child/ren not to attend what may be a damaging school environment should not be a punishable offence, yet removal of

income support is a punitive measure. Governments attempting to inflict such policies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples comes close to

- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group

How can parents be encouraged and assisted to better support and play a greater role in their children's development, education and health?

Adequate supports to parents to encourage such goals include providing a social security safety-net, access to safe less crowded housing, affordable healthy foodstuffs and access to potable water. Also, limiting mining and preventing nuclear waste from being stored in the Northern Territory will assist parents to guide their children's development and to maintain better health.

How can schools and local communities improve access and participation in early childhood services?

The quality of Pre-school delivery right across Australia is said to be lacking, so firstly, bring Pre-school services up to a reasonable level nation wide, and in remote indigenous communities, employ community members to deliver such services. Clean up our own backyard, prior to imposing dysfunctional models onto indigenous Australians seems like a necessary first step.

How can we attract good teachers to remote schools and preschools, and retain them?

What does Her Majesty's Government mean when they use the term "good teachers"?

Is a "good teacher" the type who westernises/anglicises the students, and promotes a goal of leaving the community, as being a successful outcome?

Is a "good teacher" a teacher who follows literally, all Education Department instructions regardless of the relevancy to the students?

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/millions-spent-no-evidence-of-benefit-to-indigenous-students/story-fn59niix-1226238640434>

In the sphere of Economic Development and Employment, it is all about training. Training for employment of indigenous people as a workforce for non aboriginal controlled companies. This seems to be a form of forced assimilation, and opposite to the right to economic self determination. I refer the Committee to the Indigenous Economic Development Strategy, 2011-2018.

Of the five priorities detailed in the Government Strategy, number four is "support the growth of Indigenous business and entrepreneurship" and number five "assist individuals and communities to achieve financial security and independence by increasing their ability to identify, build and make the most of economic assets". Does this proposed legislation support or undermine the Government's stated objectives?

Please also refer to UNDRIP for guidance on matters pertaining to economic self determination for Indigenous Peoples..

Community Safety

As if to promote a covert agenda, Her Majesty's Government of Australia writes that the NTER was predicated on protecting children. .

Protecting children was the rhetoric employed by Howard, admittedly, using a fake Youth Worker on ABC Lateline to carry out his sinister plan, but children were not a priority in the introduction of the NTER. Even Alexander Downer admitted that PM Howard's agenda was not primarily motivated by protecting the children. As Claire martin said, the day after, on announcing her retirement from Northern Territory Government, it made her feel sick to know that. Yet here we are four years later, with the ALP government referencing the "Little Children Are Sacred Report", as the motivation for the NTER and the rationale for another Ten Years of it. The recommendations of Little Children Are Sacred Report were ignored then, and largely being ignored now.

Issues for discussion

What is the best way to make communities safer?

Which services make the most difference?

- Safe houses?
- Police?
- Community night patrols?
- Child protection workers?
- Better planning and use of existing services?
- Others

What about giving authority to the elders, and the communities themselves, rather than continuing to undermine their authority, and then calling the communities dysfunctional?

Housing

Stronger Futures is still focused on providing public housing estates for indigenous people in the NT, meanwhile, most states and the federal govt. appear to be nourishing and nurturing private Housing Associations. To quote the Minister for Housing in Victoria Ms Lovell said. . "What we do know is that public housing systems right around the country are broken. They are not keeping up with the demand; they are not keeping up with the maintenance; it's not working well for tenants." Yet Public Housing, administered by the Northern Territory Government, on lands divided out from the communal title, is the new model for affordable rental housing as imposed via the NTER. Is this some form of social darwinism?

Thank you for your time. I hope I have made my points clear, and hope to see the Stronger Futures legislation withdrawn, or at least blocked by the Senate, and request that this Committee recommend same. If not, how can the Government believe its own rhetoric in relation to the intrinsic Rights of Indigenous Australians, never mind what the rest of the world can so obviously see. UN Special Rapporteur, Amnesty International, Concerned Australians, and many many clear voices from the "prescribed" Northern Territory communities want to see the Rights of Indigenous Australians respected. I do not believe that

this legislation does so, nor, does it seem, is it the intent. Her majesty's Governments in Australia. Learn from the past, don't just repeat it.

In good faith
Graeme Taylor