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31 January, 2011

Senate Community Affairs Committee  
ACT

Re: The Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011

I wish to make a submission to the Committee to express my opposition to the proposed Stronger Futures legislation.

I concur with the concerns expressed by community groups and national organisations, that the legislation does not reflect the views expressed by communities during the Stronger Futures consultations, and that it will further embed the disempowerment and discrimination that was begun under the Northern Territory Intervention.

In particular, please note the following grounds for my opposition to the proposed legislation:

- Food Security can't be achieved when people are unable to access fresh food because of the high costs involved. The legislation does not address this particular aspect of Food Security but prefers to focus on ensuring that stores are monitored through a licensing process. Through the proposed legislation Government has failed to address ways of reducing costs, for example, freight subsidies, development of market gardens and distribution of local produce. The licensing of stores alone is inadequate. The legislation is not utilizing the extensive research undertaken by the Parliamentary committee review 2010, and should be withdrawn and reconsidered.
- Removal of customary law and cultural practice considerations from bail applications and sentencing within criminal proceedings has been in place in the NT since 2007. These restrictions do not apply to judges in cases involving Australians of other ethnicities e.g. Afghan, Chinese etc. and are clearly discriminatory against Aboriginal people. They should be repealed and all Australians treated equally under the law.
- In 2007, as part of the NTER Legislation, the Australian Crime Commission (ACC) was established in the NT for the purpose of monitoring supposed paedophile rings and high levels of child sexual abuse. In July 2009 it was acknowledged by John Lawler (CEO of ACC) that there had been no evidence of paedophile rings in the NT and it is also now known that the incidence of child sexual abuse is similar to that of other states. It is therefore without just cause that the proposed legislation continues the activity of the Australian Crime Commission with its special coercive powers in the NT.

I ask that the legislation be withdrawn and that an alternative policy is developed, based on genuine consultation, community empowerment, the respect of Aboriginal culture, lands and languages, and the fundamental right of Aboriginal people to be able to control their own lives.

Thank you.

Julie Edgerton  
Member, Mornington Inter Church Aboriginal Awareness Committee