



Community Services Consultancy

w: www.suziqconsulting.com.au
abn: 76 901 154 305

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia
community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senators

Re: Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011 and two related bills

Sorry means you won't do it again. In horrifying contrast with The Apology, The Intervention (NTER) has all the hallmarks of the very policies that created the Stolen Generations. I am deeply concerned by moves by the Australian Government to institutionalise the worst of the so-called *Emergency Response* as permanent arrangements for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, and extend some to further disadvantaged Australians and Australians with a disability.

As a non-Indigenous woman, I don't believe it's my place to argue specific solutions to issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. However, it is clear that for durable solutions to emerge, community members themselves must be empowered to address these issues ... including being adequately resourced to do this. I am aware that Aboriginal people, their organisations and their supporters (including many eminent Australians) have dedicated phenomenal amounts of unpaid time providing the Australian Government a wealth of evidence on:

- The legitimate needs and aspirations of Aboriginal people.
- The past failures of paternalistic, *power over* strategies in responding to these.
- The ongoing undermining of the authority and capacity of Aboriginal communities to implement their own viable solutions to the problems (generally not of their making) they face.
- The damage already done to community-initiated social improvement strategies and programs by The Intervention.
- The ongoing breaches of Australia's internationally-agreed human rights obligations implicit in The Intervention and associated activities.

The reality is that The Intervention has taken resources away from Aboriginal communities, undermined existing actions being taken by communities to address issues, and imposed *white rule* at a level not seen for decades. **What makes us believe that 'we' are more concerned about abuse of Aboriginal children, than their parents and grandparents? What makes us believe that 'our' solutions will be more effective than theirs?** Our paternalism certainly hasn't produced positive outcomes over the past 200+ years!

As at May 2010 (after almost 3 years) The Intervention had cost well over \$1.5 billion and resulted in a **grand total of 8 houses** for Aboriginal people - and this is what people were forced to give up title to their Land for? Many Aboriginal people are still living in overcrowded, 3rd World conditions. At the same time, many NT communities have lost practical resources such as phones, vehicles and access to graders (which have been requisitioned by the new Shires). In some, profitable community stores which funded community improvement activities have been taken over, and pre-existing services such as community-run safe houses for women and children escaping domestic violence have been closed, as a result of government policies. The demise of CDEP means that thousands of people who were previously gainfully employed providing essential community services are now unemployed. Many continue to *work for the dole*, undertaking the same jobs as those for which they were previously paid ... **and**, to add insult to injury, half of their income is withheld and controlled by government authorities. The many communities that were already dry prior to The Intervention are forced to live with the shame of huge signs at their entrances. Imagine that **you** had signs like this outside your house, simply because some people in your suburb abused alcohol or accessed pornography! Imagine further, how it would feel if your suburb was dry, and there was no evidence that anyone in your community was accessing pornography. How would **you** respond to your children's questions about what the signs meant?

These considerations pale into insignificance against the massive damage to Language, Law and Culture, being imposed on communities. As noted by Karranjal John Hartley at a public meeting in Adelaide (5 May 2010), depowering of community Elders silences *our university lecturers, our lawyers, our doctors* ... imagine the prognosis for any society facing loss of all its leaders, thinkers, law managers and holders of knowledge.

I'd like to highlight some sources of up-to-date information on the real impact of The Intervention, and practical alternatives to addressing the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal people:

- Concerned Australians at www.concernedaustralians.com.au
- Stop the Intervention at <http://stoptheintervention.org>
- Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) at www.antar.org.au/issues_and_campaigns/nt_intervention

I also offer my own webpage at www.suziqconsulting.com.au/intervention.htm as a useful (albeit less up-to-date) source on the history of opposition to The Intervention and the evidence in support of this.

I urge you to re-examine the evidence on the so-called success of The Intervention. A credible independent source is Professor Jon Altman's 2010 critique of the government's progress report at www.crikey.com.au/2010/06/21/nt-intervention-three-years-on-governments-progress-report-is-disturbing which clearly demonstrates the failure of The Intervention to achieve outcomes in areas such as increasing school attendance, reducing child malnutrition and improved housing in Aboriginal communities. He also demonstrates the lack of utility of the BasicsCard – despite the incredible expenditure on establishing the system.

I urge you to re-examine the human rights violations implicit in NTER and its proposed extension. I particularly commend the John Barry Memorial Symposium lecture by former Chief Judge of the Family Court, Alastair Nicholson, entitled *Human Rights and the Northern Territory Intervention* delivered at the University of Melbourne on 11 November 2010 (at <http://stoptheintervention.org/facts/speeches/alastair-nicholson/11-nov-2010>).

In 2009, Concerned Australians produced a fabulous report entitled *Will They Be Heard?* which examined Aboriginal communities' responses to government consultations on The Intervention conducted earlier that year. The report found that **the question *Will They Be Heard?* has been answered. And the answer is a resounding NO.** The legislation now before Parliament shows that the feedback from Aboriginal people has been neither *heard* nor respected. I urge you to revisit this, and other sources of credible information.

I have no doubt that if you listen to the evidence, you will be convinced ongoing institutionalisation of the so-called *emergency measure* can only serve to undermine the dignity and human rights of Aboriginal people, and would bring shame on all Australians.

Suzi Quixley
Community Services Consultant/concerned Australian.