

To the Senate Community Affairs Committee
Regarding the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011

Fr Peter Maher

29.1.2012

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

I am concerned that the legislation will further disempower Indigenous Australians as they are once again excluded from any collaborative process involving them in their own futures with due respect to their prior entitlement, history since colonisation, their present reality and the recent history of the Northern Territory Intervention.

There is evidence that the Stronger Futures consultations are opposed by many communities that will be affected by the legislation, as well as welfare groups.

Priscilla Collins, CEO, North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency said recently: "The Governments focus should be on positive approaches to engage families and that take into account the barriers to participation in school in remote communities. An important part of this is ensuring that there are qualified, culturally competent social workers on the ground in remote communities, able to assist parents to address causal factors as to why kids are not going to school."

While John Falzon, CEO, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia said: "It is deeply disappointing to see the Federal Government aligning itself with policies such as compulsory income management and SEAM. These are costly distractions from the real task of reducing inequality and exclusion. You don't build people and communities up by attacking their dignity and their right to self-determination."

I ask that the legislation be withdrawn and that an alternative policy is developed, based on genuine consultation, community empowerment, the respect of Aboriginal culture, lands and languages, and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.

Sincerely

Peter Maher,
Parish priest.