

To the Senate Community Affairs Committee re the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 201

From: Michaela McCarthy  
Retired Teacher

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

Over the last four years I have been assiduously reading, thinking and discussing the NTEI. I believe it was wrongly conducted because it did not show respect for these First Peoples of Australia. Many of them feel humiliated, many of them are fearful and many of them are confused. Over the decades these people have suffered greatly. I believe we should be showing them respect and be practising deep patience for there is much to repent and amend in our culture's behaviour towards them.

An intervention could have had good outcomes if the Government had proceeded with patience, understanding that time and effort by culturally educated people, both Indigenous and non- Indigenous, were required to discover the reforms and improvements needed by the various communities.

I have come to the above view through viewing and discussing the film

"Our Generation" and also because I listen to my daughter and her confreres who are teaching in remote communities. She is stationed at Elcho Is and teaches on one of the Home Land schools. She tells me the consultations held with the communities were fraudulent - set up in such a way that many of the people were not informed about the issues and many others were not able to participate because of language difficulties.

From my extensive reading as well as my visits to my daughter's schools in the NT over the last eight years I appreciate how difficult genuine consultations would be. They would require patience and much preparation and much time. There was ridiculously little time given to the preparation and the consultations were over in a matter of weeks. I followed these Government consultations through media reports and it was apparent the Government wanted a 'quick fix' and knew how to engineer the same.

Specifically this new legislation is unacceptable because it leaves in place involuntary income management for all. Noel Pearson in his writings says this is not the way to go. He advocates voluntary income management for those who choose it. Does the Government only listen to Noel Pearson when he says what they want to hear?

In the light of my opinions you will understand why I want this new legislation withdrawn for I see in it the same bullying spirit that was in the Howard intervention initially. Respect and goodwill and mutual appreciation are the aim of all cultural relationships. This is what we desire. However without education of suitable people from both cultures we will never arrive at this longed for goal.

Teachers in particular, if we want Indigenous children to go to school willingly, must be intensively culturally educated and that will require learning their pupils' first language. Public servants, health workers, social workers must be recruited from both sides of the cultural divide... they must be thoroughly prepared through cultural education. Nothing else will do. We see the terrible cost increasing because short cuts are taken instead of thorough going reforms. Yes, and all this requires expenditure...lots of it.

But the failures that keep occurring also cost plenty. Success would make the expenditure worth it and the results in the end would pay for

themselves.

Yours sincerely  
Michaela McCarthy