

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

My name is Rebekah Copas.

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 dis-empowerment and discrimination that was begun under the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) legislation.

I ask that the legislation be withdrawn and that an alternative policy is developed, based on genuine consultation, community empowerment, the respect of Aboriginal culture, lands and languages, and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

I want to add here that I myself, full well comprehend, that it is an almighty ask of the Federal Government of the Nation State, to be real in enabling the "genuine consultation", "community empowerment", and "respect of Aboriginal culture, lands and languages", from the point of view of any Euro-centric cultural bias, which we white fellows very often can not help ourselves but be having. However, the most basic of human rights have continued to be violated through the imposition of the NTER, and it is a terrible shame upon every white Australian, that our nation state is failing its indigenous families, whose love of this land will always come first.

In my own life story, I became by accident in 1988, made conscious of my own family having probable, but not documented in historical records, indigenous ancestry. I spent many years feeling it could be ill minded of me to openly state this fact, awoken in my through having attended a traditional Corroboree at Kurnell at 25-6th January 1988. My white friends said that to identify as a white person would be like putting a hand out for more benefits from government, when black people are themselves not receiving enough. But after many years of contemplation, and some study in anthropology and linguistics, and natural medicine; AND after becoming alerted to the fact that there are clear signs in my own body, of biological inheritance sustaining evidence of indigenous ancestry, which are apart from having darker skin, (the gracilis muscle joining the inner thigh to the knee, is involved in involuntary contractions during marital relations among anybody with indigenous Australian ancestry, and is a more dominant genetic than skin colour); I chose to commence the process of more openly identifying my own Aboriginality in public contexts. The consequences have been as shocking as can be imagined, as I had little expectation that my own civil rights could become impinged. However, the process has felt like a terrible plummet down out of the kind of social status I had formerly enjoyed, even as a young sole parent. I feel less heard and like every gain is harder won. I am acutely aware that my predisposition to not want to blame other white people for racism towards me in this, is part and parcel of my Aboriginality. And I whole heartedly believe that the vast majority of non-Aboriginal Australians really have no idea about what it feels like to experience such heavy wrongful blame against us, as all Aboriginal persons are feeling.

Over the previous 9 1/2 years since I began to openly identify, I have had to socially corroborate much of the intuitive understandings of indigenous cultural precepts, which I had gained by minimal studies in anthropology and linguistics when younger, combined with

an innate understanding of animist beliefs which my family, slightly ironically, still sustain today. Identifying my Aboriginality had to be made a hard process for me, by indigenous families, so as they can be sure of my true Spirit, and real understanding of certain of indigenous cultural precepts which are pan-Australian, even though so many academics have been placing emphasis on locally based cultural differences. I am gradually becoming capable of asserting myself within an identity that is recognizable within the Dreaming of many of the traditional families, and finding my place and role within indigenous culture. So I am highly attuned with some of the kinds of difficulties which exist in communication between the Government, and traditional indigenous people. It is my express opinion, that very many Aboriginal families still today have not grasped the full understanding my own family could enable me to gain, of what all the mechanisms of social control within legislative democracies actually are. I do not intend this statement disparagingly towards indigenous people, but politely, and will assert that similarly, it is really only very few non-Aboriginal persons who are fluidly comprehensive with many of the Aboriginal cultural precepts that I understand.

I want to draw your attention to the fact that I once had a conversation with an American PhD student at Griffith university, who believes she is finding clear evidence in sociology, that in every human society, invaded populations tend to need at least 200 years of contact, before becoming adept at utilizing the systems of governance of the invading population. Similarly, perhaps invader populations take just as long to understand what it is that their ancestors moved in on. I am not able to recall the name of the PhD student, but clearly remember a long conversation I had with her, in which she could not resist telling her finding ahead of having it copyrighted properly. She could also clearly note that the difficulties she was having in communicating her findings to the Aboriginal staff at Griffith university, are a part of the exact phenomenon she is researching. I myself felt very validated by her description of her research, in that I frequently happen to notice a void of communication failures between mainstream governance structures, and Aboriginal endeavours to replicate how government works in a legislative nation state.

What is most acutely observable, is that each different culture, the Anglo-centric of mainstream Australia, and the indigenous, have not yet concurred in respect of how to discern whether or not an individual might have a criminal tendency. Clearly, a thief is a thief, and a liar a liar, but within indigenous society, it is my overt experience that social expectations of sustaining internal self discipline of the mind, are much greater than the mainstream society supposed. I do not know what the solutions will prove to be. However, I do know, that when the Little Children Are Sacred report got made, it would have been far more effective to consult with the male leadership of the indigenous communities that were mentioned, and their neighbouring communities, before taking such an extreme action as that the NTER was.

I would like here to advocate for one specific idea as a portion only of the whole solution. It is in that it could prove to be an effective way to overcome the communication failings which still now occur, if the Federal Parliament will invite traditional Aboriginal elders, (perhaps via the National Congress of First People's, but also perhaps asking for the participation of those elders who are already Christians and from within Christian practice, have a more stable concept of inter-cultural relationships), to perform a sacred ritual during the opening of every session of Parliament, similar to the ceremony done when the apology got read by Mr Rudd. The Federal Parliament House had been built with Aboriginal Art incorporated into the forecourt, in a mosaic, as well as various Art works throughout the building, and perhaps it could prove worthy to request that yearly a group of old men with specialist skills at interpreting the Art, will visit Parliament House, and grant politicians an interpretation equivalent to something like an astrological forecast based in the presence of sacred Art, and other objects, at the site of Parliament House, which is, after all, a sacred site in its own right, where the building now stands. I know that such forecasts are frequently used by people working in the stock exchange, for example, and it may well be an auspicious way to broker more effective inter-cultural communicating.

I myself grew up a Christian, but let my religious practice fall by the wayside for many years, but eventually, it proved to be curiosity about indigenous Spirituality which re-oriented me into my own Christianity; when my Warlbiri family, who have claimed me as their kin, ordered me to remember that the only way into real reconciliation will be through Jesus. This fact gives me great hope in the collective future of our nation, and for this land, to simultaneously stay afloat economically, and be ahead of the rest of the world in prevention of global warming.

There is clear research being done now in Africa, which isolates the necessity of enabling human populations to keep living in arid regions, as a fundamentally important aspect of enabling reforestation. This point is not going to be forgotten in respect of the NTER, and how real resolutions need to be found and sustained, for a real reconciliation between all non-indigenous and indigenous Australians, (distinct from, but intrinsically related to, reconciliation as it was oftener thought of, for example among Theosophists, between blacker and whiter Australians).

Thank you for your reading and genuine considerations in these matters.

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