

Please accept this as my formal submission to the Senate Inquiry regarding “Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011 and two related bills”.

As a “white”, southern Australian I found the NTER abhorrent. My reading of the “Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill” does not diminish this feeling. It seems to me to be racist and paternalistic. It seems to be assimilationist in intent and totally dismissive of indigenous culture. The original NTER and the new bills make me ashamed of my country. It seems to me abhorrent that our government - my government - should pursue these racist, assimilationist policies.

These actions and bills treat indigenous people with no respect; no respect as individuals, as groups or even as human beings.

Social justice?

I fail, totally, to see where these measures build stronger futures for aboriginal people in the NT, and fear that they will cause great harm to Australia as a whole in years to come.

The racist and discriminatory nature of the actions and bills is clear. The Racial Discrimination Act was suspended in the initial NTER and the proposed bills are racially based making the inherent racism institutionalised. Perhaps I mean “normalised”, in that racist attitudes will become even more accepted within our society. It seems that difference is penalised, is seen as a “bad thing”. Conformity to white Australian cultural values is to be seen as the measure of success. Individual home ownership, western education are lauded. Community ownership seems to be despised. At Yuendumu, for example, there are two community owned stores that have for many years provided a range of food and other supplies, stores run by and for the local community. The Government in its wisdom has seen fit to establish a third store in this small settlement, through the use of what seems to an outsider to be divisive negotiating policies.

Local control of many things - local council matters, education, health and shops has been watered down in many cases, usurped in others and totally removed in many others. It seems that many communities have been told that they cannot manage their own affairs. Certainly the obnoxious “Intervention” signs on the entrances to many communities highlight that. Fancy living in a community where the entrance has a very large sign stating “No alcohol” “No Pornography” with all the penalties listed! What brazen contempt for local people. And I have seen these signs erected at the entrances to communities that have been SELF MANAGED as dry communities for many years.

This is just the face of the paternalistic and degrading attitude that my government takes to Indigenous People.

It seems to me that these policies are designed to humiliate Indigenous People. They not only deny their cultures, they potentially destroy them. This to me is arrogant stupidity. Here we have cultures built up from vast experience and expertise and we -

our government - effectively says that we have nothing to learn from them. I would have thought that for purely selfish reasons they are worth much - from standpoint of sustainability and from the value of diversity in terms of increasing resilience. I would also have thought that the UN Declaration of Rights Indigenous People (and Australian ratified?) made it clear that we have both a duty and an obligation in regard protecting these cultures.

So we trash their culture and then tell them that they cannot manage their own affairs and then tell them the only way forward is to be like us!

Oh, what about bilingual education? This is a right. Yet it is neglected, devalued - deliberately.

The work of Wade Davis "The Wayfinders; why ancient wisdom matters in a modern world" (2009) and Hugh Brody "The Other Side of Eden" (2000) are particularly insightful regarding the value of other languages and cultures.

I travel overseas regularly and find to my great dismay that (white) Australia - my country - is regularly seen as selfish, conceited and racist. My government's actions and policies trash Australia's reputation. I am referring here to the NTER and the "Stronger Futures" bills.

I ask people in the United States about the high incarceration rates in the US - where rates are by far the highest in the western world on a country by country basis. They respond by asking me about incarceration rates in the NT, rates which exceed those in the US by quite some margin. I believe the rates of incarceration in the NT have increased since the "Intervention". I believe that incarceration of Aborigines in the NT is at a higher rate than that of "Blacks" in South Africa during the Apartheid era. Yes, I am ashamed because of this. (And I am angry because of the injustice.)

I finish with a quote from an Aboriginal Elder: "the government thinks that if they squeeze us hard enough a white man will pop out. We know that all you get is a squashed black man",