

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

January 29, 2012

Dear Secretary

Re Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011 and Two Related Bills

I have been interested, and an active campaigner in Aboriginal Affairs for many years.

When the NTER, the Intervention, was launched in 2007 I was dismayed, because there was so little evidence of genuine consultation behind it. One of its biggest flaws was that it failed to take note of the diversity of Aboriginal communities and culture, and pushed ahead with its one-size-fits-all approach. While claiming to be a response to the *Little Children are Sacred Report* it ignored all its recommendations. Pat Anderson, one of the authors of that report, said that the government's Intervention had destroyed the trust she had built up with her respondents. They felt betrayed.

It is disappointing that the Labor government has failed to overturn this legislation. It is even more disgraceful that it now intends to prolong the punitive and discriminatory policies for another ten years. The history of government policies towards Aboriginal peoples for most of two hundred years is a sorry account of politicians and bureaucrats, who often believe they are doing the right thing, repeating the same mistakes. As a citizen I am angry that our taxes are again going to be used to reinforce programs that are demonstrably counter-productive. So often, very little of the money stays with the Aboriginal communities, yet they attract the media blame for alleged waste.

The proposed legislation undermines their demands for a return to control over their communities and the right to self-determination. Cuts to family support payments have not led to improved school attendance. As the Intervention drags on, depression and despair become the prevailing state of affairs. Government statistics point to an increase in suicide and self-harm since the Intervention began, potentially leading to more expenditure to maintain a misguided system.

Where there have been successful programs in the Northern Territory the distinguishing feature is that they work with the Aboriginal people, and work with their strengths. Under the proposed legislation much has been achieved is likely to be lost or forgotten.

Virginia BURNS