

# SUBMISSION TO PARLIAMENT

## THE STRONGER FUTURES BILL.

The Stronger Futures Bill that is to be considered by Parliament will continue the Northern Territory Intervention in a different form but is still racist and not evidence based.

This legislation will continue and extend income management, makes more attacks on Aboriginal land, further dismantles community control, refuses to acknowledge customary law and adds further punitive legislation targeting Aboriginal people.

After almost five years since the Interventions was introduced into the NT, attempts at self-harm and suicide have more than doubled, imprisonment rates have soar and are still soaring, there has been a huge increase in children removed from their families and overcrowded living conditions and poor health continue. This legislation contravenes many articles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

The Intervention and now Strong Futures continue to dismantle community control over communities. Strong Futures takes further control away from communities around alcohol management plans (which are not working and are causing a rise in imprisonment rates and moving alcohol problems elsewhere), management of community owned stores, Aboriginal land and schooling. Evidence shows that communities that are more in control of their destiny have better health and social cohesion.

Government is trying to override laws that safeguard community and town camp land for Aboriginal People **forever**. The legislation would open up community living areas and town camps for unrestricted private ownership. Government wants to close down communities such as Utopia, and move the people to 18 hub towns against their wishes and against the evidence which shows that people living on Homelands generally have better health, fewer suicides, and better overall quality of life. Articles 23, 26, 28 of UNDRIP, supports the rights of Aboriginal people to live on their lands, own, control and use the lands, waters and resources and when the land was taken without their free, prior and informed consent they have a right to compensation.

Strong Futures continues assimilationist and discriminatory ideology of the NT Intervention. Aboriginal people see culture and land as belonging together and as integral to their essence. Culture makes them strong. Culture is intrinsically part of them – breaking the link between them, their culture and their land destroys something that is crucial to who and what they are. It will make it illegal for Aboriginal people to take customary law into consideration around bail or sentencing except if related to sacred objects or landscapes. This stigmatises customary law as inherently violent and abusive – not true! Customary law, according to UNDRIP must be respected at the National level. Article 8 – Indigenous people shall be free from forced assimilation; Article 34 - Indigenous people have rights to their own legal systems and customs as long as they accord with International human rights law.

There is no evidence that Compulsory Income Management improves people's lives or leads to the buying more healthy food. The cost of imposing Compulsory Income Management runs into billions and billions of dollars (without no outcomes) which should be put into funding community led initiatives and run programs to help people manage their money where the Government **WILL** get outcomes. Compulsory Income Management actually makes it harder for people to manage their money and to meet unexpected cultural commitments such as sorry business, funerals, and cultural activities which can have a profound effect on that person fulfilling their commitment as an Aboriginal person. This practice is another form of assimilation and genocide.

Stronger Futures will link Centrelink entitlements with school attendance. f children miss more than 5 days

school a term, parents can be issued with a 'compliance notice' which if not followed can lead to suspension of their entitlements. There is **NO** evidence stating that such measures actually work after five years of its imposition in the Northern Territory.

Evidences shows that punitive policies do not work, they only exacerbates the problems of high incarceration rates, and other social issues and only increases suffering for Aboriginal people, many of whom already live below the poverty line in under-resourced communities. Punitive measures do not work.

Government should withdraw the legislation and redirect the Stronger Futures funding to support community led and managed initiatives in consultation with organisations and communities which will.

They should stop paying vast salaries to non-Aboriginal *Business* managers and put the money into paying local community people real wages for all the voluntary or under-paid work they do - this would put money back into the communities and enable the whole standard of living to rise.

**30<sup>th</sup> January, 2012**