

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011 and two related bills.

As I reflect on the words of Aboriginal Elder, Rev Dr Djiniyini Gondara, *'Inequality cannot be addressed by the removal of control from affected people over their lives and their land'*(1), and consider what I believe is the overwhelming opposition of the aboriginal people to the Northern Territory Intervention (NTER) and the proposed 10 year extension, I urge the members of the Senate Committee of Inquiry into the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011 and the two related bills to call on the federal government to withdraw the legislation.

While there have been community consultations I do not believe that the aboriginal people have really been listened to. Aboriginal people see education for their children as very important but they do not agree that withholding social security entitlements is the way to achieve this. Instead they are calling for quality teachers and more aboriginal teachers as they see the inclusion of culture and language as important in their children's education.

I believe many community-initiated programs have been undermined by NTER. The aboriginal people in their communities feel powerless and no longer respected. Many men have lost a sense of purpose as the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme has been removed and they now have to work for the dole and are income-managed. There are many other hidden stories which I believe the NTER has exacerbated: increasing self-harm and suicide, poverty leading to more criminal behavior and incarceration, overcrowding as more people, because of a sense of powerlessness and lack of resources and opportunities, leave the communities for the larger towns.

Meanwhile there seems to be so much money being spent on implementing government initiatives, expanding the income management, paying outsiders to provide services, employing expensive government business managers and indigenous engagement officers and generally initiating various consultations, research reviews, reports, etc. Surely this money would be better spent on preventative programs, legitimate job creation, and supporting community-based initiatives and evidenced-based successful community programs (2).

I believe the government needs to really listen respectfully to the aboriginal people and to genuinely work in partnership with them. As Barbara Shaw of Intervention Rollback Action Group says, 'This does not mean flawed

consultations to rubber stamp the government's agenda. Our people have the solutions to the issues affecting them but they need more time, space and a legitimate community development process of talking together to work through these issues, with the support of the necessary resources.'(3)

So I again appeal to you to urge the federal government to listen to the voices of the overwhelming majority of aboriginal people and the many community groups and organisations supporting them and to withdraw the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011 and the two related bills.

Carmel F Cowan

(1) Quoted in 'Basic Rights not Basics Card' – Address to the Say No to Income Management Rally, Bankstown, 6th October 2011, Dr John Falzon.

(2) Barbara Shaw, Letter to Mr Mick Gooda, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 16th January 2012.

(3) Barbara Shaw, *ibid.*