

Committee secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

*A Submission regarding the “Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011*

The Sisters of St Joseph pay their respect to the First Peoples, custodians of this Land Australia, for thousands of years.

**We are concerned that this proposed legislation is flawed in its intent; based on selective data; and will only serve to further disadvantage Aboriginal peoples.**

1. The proposed legislation does not take an approach that recognises the dignity of Aboriginal people. It is negative, patronising and based on a hierarchical model of authority that is neither appropriate nor culturally sensitive. All successful initiatives that have brought improvements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Peoples have been ones that have **empowered** the communities – not disempowered them. Once again “The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” spells out the right of people to have a say in the governance of their communities, a right to self-determination.
2. I draw the Senate Committees attention to pg 21 of the Stronger Futures Report and the following situation which portrays a remote community using its capacity to solve its own problems
  - *The community believes that there is currently very good attendance at the school.*  
*A statement was made that there was currently very good, dedicated staff at the school.*  
*There is also very good family support in making the kids go to school.*  
*In addition, there is good community support indicated by the store not providing service to any children during school hours. The community has a good relationship with the police, shop and school to help with the kids attending school. If the kids play up at school they get into trouble from family members. The Headmaster works well with the families and children and is very supportive. There is concern for when and if the Headmaster leaves the community, they may not get someone who operates in the same way.*
3. This anecdote highlights what is needed to turn around many problems in Aboriginal Communities in the NT. Chris Sarra, well known Aboriginal educationalist calls it “The stronger smarter philosophy” The Stronger Smarter philosophy honours a positive sense of cultural identity, acknowledges and

embraces positive community leadership, enabling innovative and dynamic approaches and processes that are anchored by high expectations relationships. Relationships which honour the humanity of others, and in so doing, acknowledge one's strengths, capacity and human right to emancipatory opportunity.

4. The Stronger Futures Legislation and the Northern Territory Intervention **fails to**:
  - Honour the humanity of Indigenous Australians
  - Acknowledge the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to rise to the challenges that face them.
  - Engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in developing dynamic and productive solutions.

**Most of all** this legislation undermines the Aboriginal sense of worthiness and esteem.

We sincerely recommend that this flawed legislation be withdrawn, and in the light of the report on the recognition of Indigenous peoples in the Constitution, ensure that racism is not institutionalised in Australia through this proposed legislation. I ask that positive discussions begin with Indigenous communities, that recognise that Aboriginal people are also working to end the problems that face communities – and that these community approaches are more successful than the punitive approach of the Intervention.

Yours sincerely

Sr Marianne Zeinstra rsj