

To: The Secretary, Senate Community Affairs Committee

From: (Mr) R.O. Makinson

Submission re 'Stronger Futures' legislation

Dear Sir or Madam,

I wish to express my opposition to the proposed 'Stronger Futures' legislation.

I concur with the concerns expressed by many community groups and national organisations, that the legislation does not reflect the views expressed by Aboriginal communities during the consultations, and that it will further embed the disempowerment and discrimination that was begun under the Northern Territory Emergency Response (the 'Intervention').

That 2007 Intervention, and its continuation, has led to a wholesale disempowerment of Aboriginal communities, and a serious erosion of their capability to maintain social cohesion and mutual support. It was accompanied by a complete disregard for the pre-existing organisations and initiatives at community level that had been developed at local level and were, despite greatly inadequate support from the Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments, having slow but steady success in combating some of the threats to social well-being (for fully researched and specific examples, see 'A Better Way - Success Stories in Aboriginal Community Control in the Northern Territory', downloadable from <http://antar.streetlinemedia.com/>).

The Intervention imposed a new regime of oversight, funding and social engineering, that has swept aside these community-based initiatives. It has also applied punitive income management across the board to whole communities, regardless of the needs or merits of individuals and families. I have personal experience of people having been unable to attend to urgent family needs, including attendance at funerals, because to access their own money that had to seek permission from a remote and faceless bureaucracy.

Governments of both stripes are engaged in an extraordinary level of hypocrisy when they spout rhetoric about the need for "individual responsibility" and self-improvement, but at the same time deny individuals and families, with no valid cause, the right and ability to actually put these concepts into effect and to manage their own finances and affairs. There is an argument for case-by-case income management sanctions in extreme cases in any community in Australia, if such measures are individually justifiable, if they are adequately resourced and flexible, if they are backed up by consistent and adequate government support to the community-based organisations, and if they are subject to rapid and sensitive adjustment to reinforce improved self-management capabilities. But there is NO case for blanket imposition of a punitive and discriminatory income management regime of the sort that we have seen since 2007.

I believe further that the NT Emergency response, as originally implemented, as continued by the present Commonwealth government, and as complemented by NT legislation, is laying the basis for a further alienation of Aboriginal people from their lands and an undermining of their ability to manage community-owned land and townships. The imposition of the 'hub' community concept, and the denial of basic

services to non-hub communities, would not be tolerated by any non-Aboriginal communities elsewhere in Australia and is discrimination of the worst order.

I ask that the 'Stronger Futures' legislation be withdrawn and that an alternative policy be developed, based on genuine consultation, community empowerment, the respect of Aboriginal culture, lands and languages, and the fundamental right of Aboriginal people to be able to control their own lives.

Thank you.

R.O. (Bob) Makinson