Additional Comments by Coalition Senators

1.1 Coalition Senators make the following additional comments and recommendations concerning the Committee’s inquiry into Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011, the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2011, and the Social Security Legislation Amendment Bill 2011.

Assessing licensed premises

1.2 Coalition Senators agree with evidence provided to the committee that excessive alcohol consumption leading to alcohol-related harm is not just confined to Aboriginal people but is an issue that affects the entire community.

1.3 Clause 15 of Division 5 of the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011 states that alcohol sales must be restricted where harm may be caused to 'Aboriginal people'. This clause ignores the fact that the entire community suffers directly or indirectly from the consequences of alcohol abuse.

1.4 Coalition Senators recommend that Clause 15 of Division 5 of the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011 be amended to specify that an independent assessor may only be appointed where there is a reasonable belief that the sale of alcohol is causing harm in the ‘community’. This removes any race based reference and stigma and clearly identifies that excessive alcohol consumption and alcohol abuse has community wide consequences and requires a whole of community commitment to ameliorate.

Additional Coalition Recommendation 1

All requests made by the minister to the Northern Territory government to appoint an independent assessor must be based upon a reasonable belief, that the sale of alcohol is causing harm in the community.

Income Management referrals

2.1 The Social Security Legislation Amendment Bill 2011 inserts a new income management measure to enable income management referrals from State and Territory authorities.

2.2 Coalition Senators share the concerns raised by a number of submissions and individuals who provided evidence to the committee that there must be an established
and transparent appeals mechanism applicable to all income management referral processes.

2.3 Coalition Senators believe that while some State and Territory agencies that work with individuals and families may be suitable authorities to initiate an income management referral, because they have access to private information to base that referral, the decision must be able to be appealed by the individual or family.

2.4 Referrals from State or Territory authorities shall only be accepted by Centrelink if the authority is specified in legislation instrument and the authority has satisfied the minister that there exists an internal and external review mechanism for any decision made.

**Additional Coalition Recommendation 2**

State or Territory authorities may only be authorised by legislative instrument to refer an individual for compulsory income management where the minister is satisfied that an internal and external review mechanism exists for any decision made by that authority.

**Stronger Futures Legislation Review Timelines**

3.1 The Committee received evidence in Darwin detailing some of the statistics that detail the level of disadvantage and disconnect experienced by Aboriginal people living in both remote and regional Northern Territory. The evidence from Dr Bath revealed that child safety and well being impacts and domestic violence remain disproportionately high when compared to not only non Aboriginal people in the NT but to Aboriginal people living in other States and Territories.

3.2 Coalition Senators accept that long term change will require long term strategic investment and involvement by both Aboriginal people and governments. The systemic change required demands a degree of leadership and monitoring that the Coalition Senators believe is not evidenced through the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011.

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1 Dr Howard Bath, Northern Territory Children's Commissioner Committee Hansard p47 dated 23 Feb 2012
3.3 The Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory legislation proposes a 10 year timeframe with most provisions other than the alcohol measures being reviewed after 7 years.

3.4 A lengthy 10 year timeframe for the specific measures contained in the stronger futures legislation is considered counterproductive to achieving the necessary outcome of empowering individuals and communities to take control of their lives and of the management of their communities as soon as possible. The proposed legislation has also encouraged the emotive criticism that the government is embarking on a further 10 year intervention into the lives of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory.

3.5 While long a term commitment and investment is necessary to overcome disadvantage and disconnect, addressing alcohol abuse and land tenure in communities is fundamental before there can be any advancements towards closing the gap on disadvantage. Resolving these issues must be achieved much earlier than the 10 years specified in the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011.

3.6 There must be continual monitoring of programs and policies involving alcohol reforms, land tenure and community store standards with a formal review of progress to be completed after 3 years. The end goal being that the need for these measures contained in the Stronger Futures Legislation to be redundant and therefore lapse after 5 years.

**Additional Coalition Recommendation 3**

The Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011, the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill be formally reviewed after 3 years and lapse after 5 years from the date of assent.

Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion

Senator Sue Boyce

Senator Bridget McKenzie