Submission to Senate Inquiry into Social Security and other Legislation Amendment (Welfare SenateEnqACSSJan.10 Reform and Reinstatement of Racial Discrimination Act) Bill 2009 and the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and other Legislation Amendment (2009 measures) Bill 2009, along with the Families, Housing, Community services and Indigenous Affairs and other Legislation Amendment (Restoration of Racial Discrimination Act) Bill 2009.

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We are very worried about the proposed legislation.

It seems to us that it will not fix up one big failure of the current intervention – forcing a 'one size fits all' on to all Aboriginal families in the Northern Territory receiving government assistance.

We want the Racial Discrimination Act re-instated, as was promised. We have lived with racism all our lives. The RDA cannot prevent it, but without it, things are worse. We are not always respected here in the city. It seems that the RDA is not being re-instated but a trick way is being done around it: to make everyone on government assistance be welfare quarantined, first in the Northern Territory and then in the rest of Australia. It would be very interesting if all the aged pensioners in Sydney had their money quarantined : then maybe they'd understand what our friends in NT are

We live in Western Sydney. Our families are included in the 'disadvantaged' category, as are the going through! many people who come to our centre in Penrith. We know from our own experience that for people to come off drugs and alcohol, they need counselling, support and a reason for living. Banning grog shifts alcoholics elsewhere. It does not help cure their addiction.

Our hearts go out to our sisters and brothers in the Northern Territory. It is shameful for them have to form a special queue for food and shop only at certain stores. It brings back memories to us of what we had to do as children in New South Wales country towns. At least in the city here , we can go to Centrelink; we can ask for our income to be managed if we want to, but so many in the Northern Territory do not have that choice.

We know what it is to try to hold our culture when our language was forbidden and our rights to country have been lost and our sacred places fenced off. Now it seems our sisters and brothers in the North are suffering the same fate. We suffered under 'Mission Station Managers' in the past. Now, managers without knowledge of the culture, are being flown in, paid large salaries and given air-conditioned houses when the Aboriginal people are still living in broken down hot places. How do you think the people feel when they see this?

How many new homes have been built for Aboriginal families in disadvantaged communities? Why is it taking so long? Were the designs discussed with the families? We suffered from poorly designed houses imposed on the 'missions' in the past. From what we hear, basic mistakes are still being

The proposed changes in legislation do not make economic sense. We find it hard to believe that the government is prepared to spend \$7000 in order to quarantine an income of around \$11,000.

Couldn't this money be spent on those schemes and communities that are working well, but have had their funding cut-back?

When change is forced on people, whoever they are, their human dignity is not respected and they feel bad about themselves. We hear from the Government that community consultations took place. We also hear from our friends in Northern Territory that these were rushed, without proper interpreters and that not all communities were consulted. Certainly, many were not listened to in 2007-8. Does the Senate Enquiry panel know how many communities were consulted before this new legislation was drawn up?

The excuse for the Intervention under the Howard government was the sexual abuse of children by adults. No paedophile rings were found. Northern Territory communities are still recovering from the labelling of Aboriginal men that occurred then, but so are our families in NSW. Some of our grandsons were verbally abused at school at that time. Whatever 'bad press' is given to Aboriginal people anywhere, it can be thrown back at us. We want changes in the legislation to encourage Aboriginal communities, not weaken them.

Education is important and good teachers are needed. These need to be people who can be friends with Aboriginal families and respect them. It is the same with health workers. We find it easier, even in Sydney, to go to an Aboriginal Medical clinic. We feel safe there. You aren't going to help the Northern Territory communities by paying people to go there who do not relate well to the children and their parents.

Compulsory quarantining of welfare as such has not succeeded in getting more children to school in the Northern Territory. We think it should be removed, not kept as a 'special measure', if the RDA is restored. Noel Pearson has recommended welfare quarantine but only for families in difficulty: he did not say it should be compulsory for all families.

We know that Hon Jenny Macklin has good intentions and wants to do the right thing for Aboriginal people. We wish she had public servants who understood conditions in remote Northern Territory communities better.

Do they know what it is to have Telstra phone services that cost a lot and that cut out before the Centrelink answering system replies; to have to pay taxis to travel over 100km to get a piece of paper from Centrelink; to stand for hours in a Centrelink queue and be told to come back tomorrow; to have many funerals to go to, and no understanding from Centrelink about the need for the money, and be unable to get your own savings out! To shop once a fortnight and take 'fresh food' back 100km in the heat to a place without refrigeration – and go hungry!

We thank the Enquiry for the chance to say what we think.

Co-ordination Team,

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