

# **SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

## **Summary of a Verbal Submission**

**What Should Happen:** Using the existing formal structures such as ASTIC and NACCHO and informal structures feeding into these organisations, the Indigenous population of Australia must determine what is to happen to the existing ATSIC structure and, if it is to be abolished, what should take its place.

This could be a long process – several years - but it can not be rushed. It may involve setbacks and periods when the process is getting out of hand or seems to be counterproductive but it is a process that must happen.

### **Why This Should Happen:**

Two important reasons Indigenous affairs should be under control of Indigenous Australians:

1. Indigenous culture, belief systems, wisdom built up over many thousands of years must be preserved and developed from within the Indigenous community. This gives the life-sustaining elements of Indigenous culture the best chance of surviving.
2. The best health, educational, social, and economic outcomes are achieved when people feel in control of their lives.

### **Supportive Evidence For Why This Should Happen:**

A unique and separate approach to the administration of Indigenous affairs is justified solely on the grounds that in the past they have suffered unimaginable trauma through dispossession from their land and separation of families.

A unique and separate approach to the administration of Indigenous affairs is justified solely on the grounds that they currently experience living conditions demonstrated by, for example, life expectancy and incarceration rates vastly different from that experienced by most non-Indigenous Australians.

However, I believe there is a more powerful reason for Indigenous affairs to be conducted in a manner different from the rest of Australia.

Until our current epoch, we have been engaged in a constant battle to survive local conditions involving war, disease, famines and other natural disasters

Probably for the first time in human history we are now able to envisage, if not the extinction of the human race, then the threatened survival of whole nations or very large numbers of people.

Hence the constant use of the term sustainability.

To different people sustainability can mean anything from basic survival to maintenance of the highest material standard of living possible. Whatever the emphasis, it is generally applied to environmental factors such as preservation of resources and pollution or modification of the biosphere. However, other elements of the human condition are just as, or even more important.

I believe Indigenous culture can make a major contribution to the pursuit of sustainability. Indigenous Australians can be relevant role models and a source of ideas because of their different social structures and belief systems.

1. Social structures in Indigenous communities involve a strong sense of connectedness to each other.
2. Indigenous Australians experience a strong connection to their natural environment.

3. Indigenous Australians appear to be able to say no to material growth easier than non-Indigenous Australians, to be able to demonstrate a different set of values to our own, which heavily emphasise material wealth.
4. Indigenous Australians are naturally spiritual in the sense that they naturally engage with ideas, which attempt to come to grips with the mystery of life.
5. Indigenous Australians give greater recognition to older members of society.
6. Stable social structures, built up over thousands of years demonstrate wisdom different from our own but highly relevant to our own desire for sustainable ways of behaving.

Unless Aboriginal Australia can develop separate from but intermingling with white Australian society, all the many aspects of Indigenous culture, which are so relevant to our future, will be lost to the world.

**My Background:**

I am a semi-retired secondary science teacher. Whilst I have had a distant interest in Indigenous issues over the years it is only in the last 5 years that I have become active with a local community reconciliation group in Whitehorse – the Whitehorse Friends for Reconciliation (WFFR)

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