

Select Committee on the Administration of Indigenous Affairs

Inquiry into the Administration of Indigenous Affairs

Submission No: 226

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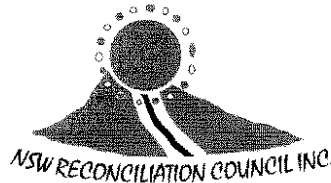
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Submission to the Senate Select Committee on the Administration of Indigenous Affairs

The NSW Reconciliation Council (NSWRC) is the peak body representing reconciliation in NSW. The NSWRC manages a range of projects aimed at furthering reconciliation at the local, regional and state level and provides the NSW Government with advice about reconciliation and Indigenous issues.

The NSWRC is an independent incorporated body which represents over 2000 members from metropolitan, regional and remote NSW. The NSWRC works with Reconciliation Australia and the peak state Reconciliation bodies in other States and Territories to advance the work of the former federal Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

The NSWRC is committed to the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation's vision for a *"United Australia which respect this land of ours, values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, and provides justice and equity for all."*

The NSWRC would like to express our concern to the Senate Committee regarding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Bill 2004 and the changes to the proposed administration of Indigenous programs and services by mainstreaming departments and agencies.

The NSWRC is strongly opposed to the abolition of ATSIC without a corresponding commitment to establish a replacement elected Indigenous body. The NSWRC is also strongly opposed to the mainstreaming of Indigenous services, on the grounds that mainstreaming is not a solution likely to deliver real improvements in the social and economic wellbeing of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The NSWRC also urges the Senate Committee to oppose the proposed changes on the grounds that they undermine moves for the achievement of meaningful reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and the broader community.

As the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation outlined in its Final Report - *Reconciliation: Australia's Challenge* – self-determination and the recognition of the distinct rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia's first people is fundamental to the achievement of reconciliation.

"There is an important connection between rights issues and practical aspects of reconciliation. The denial of the enjoyment of rights underpins much of the social and

economic disadvantage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples" (2000, p78). These rights include the right of self-determination and the right to manage essential services targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Importantly, the message which the Bill and the mainstreaming of services sends only serves to reinforce outdated and incorrect views about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – views which are a major barrier to reconciliation. Whilst the Federal Government's recent rhetoric has emphasized the importance of working in partnership and consultation with Indigenous communities, this is strongly undermined by its actions.

The decision to abolish ATSIC was made without making any serious attempt to consult with the Indigenous community. They were not seriously consulted about the establishment of an Indigenous advisory council, which is evident from the high level of opposition to the newly appointed body. The Government's 'partnership' rhetoric is also undermined by the moves to mainstream or tender out services previously managed by Indigenous organisations, which sends the message that the Government is not really serious about supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to manage their own affairs, let alone supporting them in structure which have any real form of political power.

Without the establishment of a national body which has the support and proper mandate to represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the Government is also shutting off the possibility of a negotiation and agreement process which is required to negotiate key issues for reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the Commonwealth Government.

The NSWRC urges this Committee to reject the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Bill 2004 and the changes to the proposed administration of Indigenous programs and services by mainstreaming departments and agencies, as a gesture to the community that it rejects these changes and the policy they represent.

Thankyou,

Sylvie Ellsmore
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NSW Reconciliation Council