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Sent: Monday, 26 July 2004 6:51 PM
To: Committee, Indigenous Affairs (SEN)
Subject: Senate Enquiry into Indigenous Administration

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to your Committee's Inquiry on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Bill 2004 and proposed related changes to the administration of Commonwealth Indigenous affairs policy.

The Federal government is responsible for protecting the rights of Indigenous Australians to self-determination, human rights, and First Peoples' status and the inherent rights that flow from that status.

The ability of Indigenous people to determine who represents them locally, regionally, nationally and internationally is fundamental to these rights. It follows they should have the right to make free and informed choices for themselves, their families and communities.

The current bill and proposed administrative arrangements denies these fundamental rights. As mere advisers they will lose the right to have meaningful involvement in decision-making affecting their lives and communities. The Government's own review of ATSIC endorsed the need for national elected Indigenous representation, and greater control at a regional level.

The health of Indigenous Australians is inextricable from their cultural self esteem and self determination. It has been shown that all aspects of Indigenous life are significantly better where there is full and effective Indigenous involvement in decision-making, strong Indigenous organisations and governance, and appropriate cultural recognition within both Indigenous and non-Indigenous institutions.

Wholesale mainstream service delivery is a backward step. It should be offered within the framework of a response to Indigenous community and cultural needs. Governments, mainstream departments and agencies must be publicly accountable for the provision of services to Indigenous people and such accountability should include rigorous monitoring frameworks and the ability for Indigenous people to exercise such accountability.

The replacement for ATSIC should not be an imposition on Indigenous communities, but should be determined in consultation and negotiation with Indigenous stakeholders, on the basis of their informed consent.

Yours sincerely

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