



**SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL
LEGISLATION COMMITTEE**

by the

MULTICULTURAL COUNCIL OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY INC

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in relation to the

**PROPOSED AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION LEGISLATION
BILL 2003**

24 April 2003

The Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory (MCNT) is extremely concerned at, and therefore opposes strongly, the changes to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission proposed by the Federal Attorney General. The Council has urged all politicians who care for human rights to vigorously oppose these amendments and to show their support for an independent and effective Human Rights Commission.

The Multicultural Council is of the opinion that the proposed amendments will make HREOC into a toothless tiger. Not only will its independence be totally compromised if these amendments go through, but what is also of great concern to us is the abolition of the position of the five specialist Commissioners. Especially the Race and the Social Justice Commissioner positions are more important than ever in an environment where racism is rife and Social Justice is being eroded day by day.

MCNT is only too painfully aware of the extent to which racism is a fact of life in our society. Only last month the Multicultural Council conducted seminars in Darwin and Alice Springs on the topic of Racism. Participant feedback left no doubt that racism is badly affecting the lives of many Indigenous people and of people of immigrant and refugee backgrounds, especially those belonging to 'visible minorities'.

MCNT is also extremely concerned that HREOC, if these changes go through, must ask permission from the Attorney General before it can intervene in a court case on a human rights principle. It is clear that this can and will create a serious conflict of interest.

MCNT is of the view that in a civilised society, to combat racism and to promote Social Justice, a two-pronged approach is needed. The Government must tackle racism by educating the community through the implementation of comprehensive national anti racism strategies. At the same time we must have effective and independent complaint mechanisms through a specialised Race Discrimination and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner position.

MCNT is the Peak Northern Territory Advocacy body which represents the concerns, issues and aspirations of the multicultural sector in the Northern Territory. MCNT feels very strongly that an Independent HREOC with specialist Commissioners is the best way to work towards a harmonious multicultural society where human rights are high on the political agenda.

**for MCNT
Beryl Mulder, Vice President
24 April 2003**