

Clifford, Julia (SEN)

From: h.robert@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au
Sent: Wednesday, 23 April 2003 3:38 PM
To: Legal and Constitutional, Committee (SEN)
Subject: Re: URGENT: Federal Government proposes to abolish position of Aboriginal and Torres

Peter Hallahan
Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee
Room S1.61, Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Hallahan,

I would like to make a submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee towards its consideration of the Federal Government's proposals to modify the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and to do away with specific commissioners for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice, Race Discrimination, Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Disability Discrimination Commissioner and Human Rights.

This bill represents an effective dismantling of HREOC as an independent body, and will reduce protection of human rights in Australia to mere tokenism. The specificity of the existing commissioners is vital to their effectiveness, and to their ability to gain an in-depth understanding of the complexity of discrimination and human rights for diverse groups of people.

The proposed requirement for the Commissioners to gain approval from the Attorney General before intervening in court cases would put an end to the independence of the Commissioners, and result in grave conflicts of interest in the many instances where HREOC could assist in making the government accountable for its own human rights and discrimination issues.

Democracy requires not merely brute majoritarian rule, but also a vigilant protection of the rights of minority and disadvantaged peoples. This legislation proposes the dismantling of that protection.

I trust that your committee will recognise these serious harms, and issue a strong recommendation that the bill be rejected.

Yours sincerely,
Hannah Robert

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