

Clifford, Julia (SEN)

From: Ken Blackman [kenjbla@hotmail.com]
Sent: Wednesday, 23 April 2003 1:21 PM
To: Legal and Constitutional, Committee (SEN)
Subject: inquiry into HREOC propped changes

Mr. Peter Hallahan
Secretary
Senate Legal & Constitutional Committee
Parliament House
Canberra

Dear Mr. Hallahan

I wish to state that the time allowed by the Committee for responses from the community on the above matter, ending today, is too short! It should be extended for at least a month. I know of two people who are busier than I am and who are concerned but need time to respond.

As a local community member working with a few others for Aboriginal Reconciliation - largely with my local Council - I think the changes proposed are worrying.

The state of community awareness of Aboriginal disadvantage, as reflected, for example, in criminal justice, health and employment statistics remains quite low in my local area, even though the general level of education is high. This is the long-term challenge to which the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner's work is in part directed. His experience, independence and freedom to focus on specific indigenous issues is at risk under the model put forward by the Government for a future AHRC (HREOC). Indigenous justice should NOT have to compete against other legitimate human rights concerns - especially in an era when governments are all seemingly hell-bent on cost cutting (and tax cuts too!)

Specifically, it is outrageous that any Attorney-General should have a veto on any intention by such as the Social Justice Commissioner to apply to intervene in court cases - surely the *legal* consideration of the propriety of such application is enough, and does not need *political* supervision!

I think the evidence is overwhelming that we will need the Aboriginal Social Justice Commissioner's words of warning and encouragement for a long while yet, in a land where indigenous deaths in custody still exercise the editorial writers; where wages 'stolen' from aboriginals in the last century are a hot issue; where Native Title claims are being met with evasive, legalistic and/or minimising responses from State governments and courts - as last year in Western and Northern Victoria. I do not believe that the report of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination a few years ago, arrogantly dismissed by the present government, has lost much of its weight yet. Do we want to rely on the international community to remind us when we are falling short in a fundamental area like indigenous rights?

I would like to appear before the Committee if the opportunity arises in Melbourne.

Yours faithfully

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30/04/2003

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