

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO HOWARD'S NT INTERVENTION BILLS

I am writing as a concerned citizen. I live in Sydney. I have a European heritage. I am writing because I am fearful that the proposed intervention in the Northern Territory will be a repeat of the government interventions with Indigenous people in the past. I have felt a shame on behalf of my European ancestors, of the way that Aboriginal people were treated, of the way their lands were taken and how they were sent and restricted to Missions.

The permit system allows Aboriginal people to take responsibility for their own lands, their own communities. How will the Government keep the grog runners out of Aboriginal communities without a permit system? I understand that at Mutitjulu they have thrown suspected pedophiles out of their community using the permit system. The Government should not remove the permit system.

I welcome any real support for indigenous health and welfare and the proposed support of the police and the military are most probably suitable for logistics and coordination. But surely health care, youth services, education and basic housing are even more important. Also any health or welfare program must involve the people on the ground or it won't work. And I understand that for many people in the NT communities, their first language is not English. Who will interpret for the police and the military?

From what I understand the medical personnel that are being sent to the NT are reluctant to examine a young child without a parent's permission. Of course, any child that is vulnerable or at risk should be immediately protected, but a wholesale intrusion into women's and children's privacy is a violation of human rights and is reminiscent of forced medical examinations of Aboriginal children in the past. I have heard that many women have left their communities and fled to Alice Springs, fearful that their children will be removed. This is indeed like the past and certainly does not lead to the safety of children. Housing in Alice Springs is already overcrowded!

From what I understand the Government has known about the problems in Aboriginal communities in the NT for at least 10 years. Why rush into something now without careful consideration of what is the best action to take and with full cooperation of the communities involved? I believe that the government should implement recommendations from the *Little Children are Sacred* report. The report identifies the keys to solving the problem: education and reducing alcohol consumption. "School is the way to keep future generations of Aboriginal children safe." (Summary of Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse 2007)

The cost of the proposed military intervention is enormous. Why not spend this money on essential services such as health and social services, housing and education.?

The report recommends better dialogue between mainstream society and Aboriginal communities. I urge the government to give more time for consideration of the implications of the bill and its ramifications for the future of the affected communities. Please, I don't want to feel any more shame for being a white Australian.

Yours Sincerely,

Karen Paroissien
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