

From: Barrie Griffiths, North East Forest Alliance
Sent: Friday, 10 August 2007 8:50 PM
To: federal mps
Subject: NT Intervention

To: Federal Members of Parliament.

Regrading Proposed Legislation to Intervene in the Northern Territory.

We strongly urge you to exercise a conscience vote and oppose this appalling legislation.

The legislation constitutes a politically opportunistic and punitive measure cynically misrepresented as motivated by concern for the horrific problems of illness and abuse in many Aboriginal communities.

Such problems exist also in non-indigenous communities, and need to be addressed wherever they occur, with appropriate well-funded programs of health care and counselling services, provision of adequate affordable housing and other infrastructure.

These problems in indigenous communities do not reflect traditional Aboriginal culture, but the particular susceptibility of a people suffering grievously from past abuse and on-going neglect by white society.

Prior consultation with Aboriginal communities as to appropriate measures, and their involvement on a basis of consent, is required. Processes of discussion amongst Aboriginal communities is essential to such consultation. Some Aboriginal people did not initially fully understand what was proposed, or the implications. However, indigenous leaders from all over the Northern Territory are opposed to the legislation, saying that it will destroy their culture.

The proposals are beyond belief: send in the army; send in Federal police; amend Land Rights legislation and take over the land; remove protective restrictions on entry to Aboriginal communities; use welfare payments as part of this appallingly coercive, racially discriminatory package of measures.

It is not difficult to see how, with such a substantial allocation of funding and resources as is proposed, more appropriate measures to address these serious issues could be implemented by Aboriginal communities themselves, in co-operation with government agencies, in accordance with conditions ensuring accountability and effectiveness.

The legislature does not implement even one of the recommendations of the Little Children are Sacred Report. It has been drafted and the intervention commenced without any meaningful consultation with indigenous communities, and it includes measures such as the removal of the permit system for entry into indigenous land and a five-year takeover of the leases of 73 townships and communities that have nothing to do with the issue of sexual abuse and are simply part of the Federal Government agenda to undermine indigenous land rights.

As former Federal Court Judge Murray Wilcox has observed, this legislation clearly breaches the Racial Discrimination Act. The Bill seeks to exempt part of the legislation from that Act, which is

disgraceful.

This appalling legislation will shock reasonable people and governments around the world, to our shame. It must be rejected.

Barrie Griffiths.