



The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council

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The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC) fully endorses the stance taken by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia in calling for Senators not to pass the Stronger Futures Northern Territory Bill 2011.

NATSICC have been consulting and listening to our Aboriginal brothers and sisters in the Northern Territory and have come to the conclusion that the Stronger Futures Bill is not the answer for all Aboriginal people. "In its true sense, it (the NTER) has really disempowered Indigenous Australians living in the NT" said one respondent to our consultations. Because our communities are made up of so many different language groups, ages, personalities and geographical boundaries, the council strongly advises against a 'one size fits all' mentality when legislating for our people.

There is often mention of the GAP between Indigenous and non Indigenous people in Government media releases. It is our experience that in some areas this GAP has widened. People have told us of the shame of being forced to use the Basics Card when other people can use cash. "It makes it look like we can't look after ourselves" the respondent said.

The constant chorus of dissatisfaction and unease emanating from our elders in the Territory is a clear vote of NO against 'Stronger Futures'. These are the people on the ground, the people who have lived through paternalistic measures and feel that, as a country, we are returning to those days by implementing the Bill.

The Elders and other community members of Ramingining, NE Arnhemland, in their submission to the senate inquiry:

Without control over their lives people get tired and sick.

What the council believes to be ineffective consultations during the planning stages of the Stronger Futures Legislation have left Aboriginal communities feeling isolated, ignored and undervalued by Australia's law makers.

Perhaps it may be time to revisit the foundation document of Catholic Social Justice - Rerum Novarum in which Pope Leo XXII details that the **Principle of Subsidiarity** is paramount in any discussions regarding service delivery to communities:

"No Higher level of organisation (such as government) should perform any function that can best be handled at a lower level (such as families and local communities) by those who are closer to the issues or the problems."

We ask that the members of the senate vote **no** to the legislation and listen to what Aboriginal people are saying. They are stating that there are some good facets of the Stronger Future Plan but the majority of initiatives are not good. They are saying that they do not want a 10 year extension to 'the intervention' and they are not the only ones.

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