



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Catholic Church speaks out on “Stronger Futures” legislation – questions its appropriateness for Aboriginal people Media Release

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC) and the Bishops Commission for Relations with Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (BCRATSI) of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) today take the opportunity to remind senators of some issues surrounding the *Stronger Futures legislation* that will come before the Senate on Monday.

Chair of NATSICC Thelma Parker said that there are a number of problems with the legislation and hopes that the Senate will look closely at the problems.

“The blanket approach endorsed in the *Stronger Futures legislation* is simply inappropriate. Changes introduced in recent years have resulted in stable conscientious Aboriginal people being exposed to the embarrassment of using a basic card for their essential items, whilst others in order to obtain cash have sold at a discount the credit on their basic card. This highlights inequities in the system and the problematic nature of the ‘card system’,” said Ms. Parker.

“The legislation asks for the trust of the Aboriginal people for the next ten years – but this trust has not been earned.”

With a long tradition of working in Aboriginal communities, the Catholic Church’s concerns are about the excellent programs on a local level which will be affected by this legislation.

“At the local level, these programs have used local staff, the local culture and practices in service delivery. The principle of subsidiarity recognises that the organisations closer to the problem are often best placed to find solutions. Where it has been implemented, outcomes have been positive”, said Ms. Parker.

NATSICC and the ACBC also endorse the use of bilingual teaching in schools. They said that by using the knowledge and life experiences of Elders and applying a case-by-case approach to problem solving serves as a sound basis for any legislation in the Northern Territory.

“It is time to look at the successes of the current legislation, listen to the communities advise what is not working and ‘lower our eyes’ to the specific needs of individual communities and adapt service delivery accordingly”, she said.

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