



Aboriginal Catholic Ministry

Sydney Archdiocese



Last-ditch call to Senators to drop Stronger Futures

It is expected that the Senate will finally debate and pass the *Stronger Futures* Bills on Monday. In passing this legislation Senators, like their Lower House colleagues, will ignore widespread condemnation from NT Aboriginal Nations; Aboriginal organisations and individuals; churches; welfare agencies; human rights organisations; the international community; reconciliation groups and a swathe of prominent Australians. Forty thousand people have signed the *Stand for Freedom* petition. Additionally, over 400 individuals and organisations made submissions to the Senate Community Affairs inquiry into the Bills. Almost all of those submissions called either for significant changes or total abandonment of *Stronger Futures*.

The Government and the Opposition have comprehensively ignored this outpouring of criticism. In February this year, the Prime Minister said:

The Australian Government is ensuring Indigenous people are central to policy development and implementation. The Government is listening to their views — for example, in last year's Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory consultations.

This is not true. The so called consultations that the Government is using as justification to push through this legislation have been widely criticised as failing to properly consult and engage with Aboriginal people. They certainly fail the “free and prior informed consent” required under the United Nations’ Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which this Government purports to support.

The Government does not have the consent of Aboriginal people. On the contrary, NT Aboriginal Nations have clearly spoken. The Yolŋu Nations Assembly, for example, has said: *The Yolŋu Nations reject the Stronger Futures Bill (and those associated) and call on the Senate to discard these Bills in full. We have clearly told you we do not support the legislation.*

Likewise, the Gurindji people at Daguragu and Kalkaringi have called on the Government to *get rid of the 'Stronger Futures' laws. This Intervention must be abolished, not extended for another 10 years. It is racist and has caused so much suffering in our community. We have lost everything and have no control.*

Graeme Mundine, Executive Officer of the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry, Sydney Archdiocese, is critical of Governments for not listening to Aboriginal people. "Since the Intervention's introduction in 2007, both Liberal and Labor Governments have systematically ignored the voices of those affected by these draconian and paternalistic policies," Mr Mundine said. "They think they know best, but we know from more than 200 hundred years of Whitefellas making decisions for us that they don't.

"Every single person I have spoken to from the Northern Territory has told me that things are worse there now than they were before the Intervention. They have made it very clear that they do not want this legislation. What Aboriginal people want are genuine partnerships which preserve dignity and enhance self-determination. To achieve this, the Government needs to change its attitude not create more legislation. You don't need legislation to address disadvantage, you just need the willingness to do so.

"I urge Senators to ensure that they really understand what they are doing in passing this legislation. Recently, I wrote to all Senators and it was clear from the replies I received that none of them, other than the Greens, have given this any thought. They are simply toeing the Party line. They are not questioning what they are being told and they are not listening to Aboriginal people.

"I call on Senators to refrain from passing this racist and discriminatory legislation and instead commit to working with Aboriginal people to address these pressing issues in genuine partnership," Mr. Mundine concluded.

14th June 2012