



# Australian Association of Social Workers Ltd.

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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Co-operation not Coercion – Restoring Respect for Australia’s First Peoples by Saying NO to Stronger Futures Legislation**

On the eve of the 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Northern Territory Emergency Response, the Australian Association of Social Workers, representing 7000 members nationally is calling on Senators to oppose the Stronger Futures Legislation which discriminates against Australia’s First Peoples.

The AASW joins with the Yolngu Nations Assembly in supporting their statement that “The Australian Federal Government can achieve all its aims through partnership in our communities. They have no need to grant themselves the continued and new powers contained within these bills.”<sup>1</sup>

The negative stereotypes of Australia’s First Peoples that have been perpetuated over the past five years must now stop. “Perhaps the most disillusioning aspect of Government intrusions is the total failure to acknowledge the instances of success and advances within communities which have occurred despite the lack of adequate community funding in areas of business, rehabilitation, bi-lingual learning and others. Prior to 2007, community elders were responsible for 80% of homelands being ‘dry communities’. The failure of Government to recognise these achievements has affected the relationship with communities and undermined the authority of the elders.”<sup>2</sup>

Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage and Closing the Gap efforts will fail if coercive approaches continue. The Productivity Commission has identified numerous examples of ‘what works’ for Australia’s First Peoples: working in partnership, having “community ownership of the problem and the solution (was) fundamental in the success of the ... program. This was considered particularly critical as historical factors had led to feelings of chronic helplessness and hopelessness, which contributed to an increased risk of suicide.”<sup>3</sup>

It is this feeling of chronic helplessness and hopelessness that is contributing to the more than doubling of attempted suicide since the Intervention<sup>4</sup>. The only way forward is articulated in the Yolngu Nations Assembly Statement. “If we are citizens together in this country, lifting up the one flag, each calling Australia our home, then we must work with respect.”<sup>5</sup>

The AASW joins with over 400 organisations to strongly urge all Senators in the Australian Parliament to listen to the Yolngu Nations Assembly and reject the Stronger Futures Bills when they come before the Senate.

#### **Professor Karen Healy**

National President

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<sup>1</sup> [http://concernedaustralians.com.au/media/Stronger\\_Futures\\_Statement\\_Yolngu.pdf](http://concernedaustralians.com.au/media/Stronger_Futures_Statement_Yolngu.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.concernedaustralians.com.au/media/Children-of-the-Intervention-June-2011-r2.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/64750/keyindicators2007.pdf](http://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/64750/keyindicators2007.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/nter\\_reports/ctg\\_nt\\_monitoring\\_rpt\\_janjun\\_2011/Documents/ctg\\_nt\\_monitoring\\_rpt\\_pt2\\_janjun11.pdf](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/nter_reports/ctg_nt_monitoring_rpt_janjun_2011/Documents/ctg_nt_monitoring_rpt_pt2_janjun11.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [http://concernedaustralians.com.au/media/Stronger\\_Futures\\_Statement\\_Yolngu.pdf](http://concernedaustralians.com.au/media/Stronger_Futures_Statement_Yolngu.pdf)