

Australian Council for Adult Literacy

GPO Box 2283 Canberra ACT 2601

Phone: 03 9546 6892 Fax: 03 9546 0421

Email: info@acal.edu.au

Web: www.acal.edu.au



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The Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL), expresses its solidarity with Yolngu Elders in their call to the leaders of the Australian and Northern Territory Parliaments to reject Stronger Futures legislation. As an organization that promotes adult literacy and numeracy policy and practice, and that advocates on behalf of equitable adult literacy and numeracy provision for all Australians, ACAL is especially conscious of the disadvantage confronting adult Indigenous Australians.

It is the experience of our members that progress in transformative adult learning can only take place in conjunction with a profound respect for cultural difference and autonomy. Without these, the engagement and commitment of adult literacy learners is very fragile. This is especially the case for Indigenous learners whose mother tongue is not standard English and whose schooling has failed them.

Unfortunately, the 'Intervention' taints and contaminates all current educational programs. For clients, this legislation will all too easily come to be seen as embodying or carrying overtones of: disrespect, lack of consultation, failure to acknowledge resources and capacities already existing within Indigenous organisations, communities, families and individuals, and instead, tar everyone with the same demeaning brush. This does not create a positive or forward-looking environment within which educators and students can work together productively.

Given the seriousness of this extension of the Intervention for the standing of Australia in the eyes of the world, we must express our profound unhappiness to the manner in which this extension has been handled. Consultation seemed to be more tokenistic than a sustained effort to bring these important policy matters before the tribunal of public opinion, public discussion, and informed democratic debate.

Geri Pancini

President, Australian Council for Adult Literacy