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**Re - Statement of the Yolngu Nations Assembly regarding the Commonwealth
Stronger Futures Bill**

Thank you for drawing to the attention of the AMA the statement by the Yolngu Nations Assembly regarding the *Stronger Futures* Bill.

As you know, the AMA has a very strong history of advocating for improvements in the health and life expectancy of Aboriginal peoples. The AMA has consistently argued that health services for Aboriginal people should be devised and implemented by Aboriginal people, and that policies and programs in Aboriginal health should be conceived and developed in genuine partnership with Aboriginal peoples and their representative organisations.

It is concerning, therefore, to note the issues raised by the Yolngu Nations Assembly regarding the measures proposed in the *Stronger Futures* program for the Northern Territory. The AMA believes that measures which limit or reduce the fundamental rights of Aboriginal peoples, and the control they have over their lives are not appropriate ones to improve health.

At the end of May 2012, the AMA published the *AMA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Audit Report 2012 – Progress to Date and Challenges that Remain* which assessed government programs and initiatives over the last 10 years to improve the health of Aboriginal peoples. The following is one of the major observations made in this assessment:

Punitive approaches to health improvement, and measures that demean and stigmatise (such as the signs proscribing alcohol and pornography) do not contribute to healing and inevitably fail. Australian governments should immediately abandon these approaches.

It is the AMA's view that a healthy future for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders depends on the right opportunities for these Australians to empower themselves for better health. Paternalistic approaches to health policy act contrary to this.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Hambleton". The signature is written in a cursive style and is followed by a horizontal line.

Dr Steve Hambleton
President
13 June 2012
