



VICTORIAN INDIGENOUS EDUCATION NETWORK

A statement of support for the Yolŋu Nations Assembly in their rejection of 'Stronger Futures' Bills.

The members of Victorian Indigenous Education Network (VIEN) wholeheartedly support the Statement made by Yolŋu Nations Assembly to the Australian Federal and Northern Territory Parliaments, calling on the Senate to discard the 'Stronger Futures' Bills in full.

We also endorse the call made by Yolŋu Nations Assembly for the Federal and Northern Territory Governments to 'end their interventionist policies and agendas, and return to a mindset of partnership based on the principles of self-determination'.

A significant number of the Aboriginal students from VIEN schools come from NT communities already affected by the Intervention. We as a network commit ourselves to stand alongside the elders of their communities at this crucial time when their voice must be heard.

VIEN would like to make a particular response of support for the last point of the Yolŋu Nations' Statement regarding their deep and realistic concerns for the loss of their languages. Their fears are grounded in the new 'English only' policy which has been implemented by the NT Department of Education and Training for Indigenous children in remote communities. This policy defies their own testing that showed Bilingual schools (with only minimal systemic support) were still testing ahead of the 'English only' schools.

Many members of Indigenous communities, and those who stand with them, are anxious that the research that supports the use of the students' mother tongue for their early education (while they learn English orally), should be made known. This research demonstrates that such an approach (when well supported), results in far better educational outcomes for the children of Indigenous minorities. In addition, such an approach helps

retain their threatened languages, strengthens cultural ties and empowers Indigenous teachers, parents and other community members as they become involved in the school education of their own children.

As an educational network that is vitally concerned for the preservation of aboriginal languages through the educational process, we wish to emphasize that the move away from Bilingual Education is a backward step in the teaching and learning process of all concerned.

We would ask you to please heed the appeal of the Yolngu people on this strategic issue for the future well-being of their communities.

Over all, we believe that the 'Stronger Futures' Bills and the way they may be applied does not adequately protect appropriate rights to self-determination for the groups and communities to whom it applies. These rights to self-determination are defined in the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

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