

MEDIA RELEASE

MORNINGTON INTERCHURCH ABORIGINAL AWARENESS GROUP, (VICTORIA), stands with Yolgnu Elders in their opposition to the “Stronger Futures” legislation.

The Mornington Interchurch Aboriginal Awareness Group, which draws its membership from five Christian denominations on the Mornington Peninsula, has had first hand contact with the Elders of the Yolgnu nations of north east Arnhem Land and their concerns for more than a year. The opposition of many Indigenous clan leaders, particularly the Yolgnu Elders, to the Federal Government’s “*Stronger Futures*” legislation, is very well known to us.

As a Group, we strongly support their criticisms set out in their current statement of the Yolgnu Nations Assembly of the legislation about to go before the Senate for debate.

On the occasion of the original Howard Government’s Emergency Intervention, we made contact with the Yolgnu Elders, and studied the concerns they expressed with their people, especially how they were being discriminated against by the Intervention’s actions, and without any effective consultation – before or afterwards.

From the leaders we have learned how they anticipate the ten year duration of the proposed legislation will do irreversible damage to Indigenous language, culture, law, justice, leadership authority, and morale in communities.

It is clearly documented in the Jeff McMullin facilitated Maningrida Forum of 21/02/12, that the concerns and rights of these Australian citizens and their clearly expressed views, are being ignored. Discrimination is being practiced.

From the direct evidence we have heard, our Group is convinced the proposed legislation will not only further erode already established Indigenous initiatives and culture, but also increase the damage to Australia’s reputation overseas.

It is too often assumed by non-indigenous Australians that there is little available and capable leadership, and that there is an absence of concern for these issues at grassroots community levels. These assumptions are grossly in error.

Our experience over 19 years as a Group suggests that changing policy principles towards the full participation of Elders in finding solutions will build a more just relationship between our two cultures, a goal all Australians desire.

30/04/2012