



Leaders of the Congregations and Provinces of the Sisters of St Joseph, Australia

MEDIA RELEASE

Josephites urge Senate to reject Stronger Futures Bill?

The Sisters of St Joseph throughout Australia are urging Senators to reject the Stronger Futures legislation when it comes before the Senate in Early May.

Josephites continue to question the government's proposed expansion of compulsory income management, its punitive welfare policy, and particularly the new proposal (SEAM), which aims to increase school attendance by tying welfare payments to days that students are present at school.

Speaking as a Leader of the Sisters of St Joseph right across Australia, Sr Anne Derwin echoed the ongoing disappointment of many Australians.

'This latest bill reminds us once again of all our concerns about the previous legislation. The Bill seems to be at cross purposes with the Government's own social inclusion principles. The rights of Aboriginal people are not sufficiently protected, and the new legislation was developed even before the evaluations of the previous programs were concluded,' Sr Anne said.

'We are particularly disturbed by the continuing failure to include the Aboriginal communities in genuine and adequate consultation and participation. The considerable disquiet among Aboriginal people is indicative of the levels of anxiety and alienation caused by these latest proposals.'

Sisters have expressed ongoing concern about a number of issues;

- the selective and limited consultation with Aboriginal communities and leaders,
- the fact that, of all the proposals related to SEAM, only the most punitive was chosen,
- the rejection of the maxim that community-led and community-owned solutions are more likely to succeed than top-down punitive measures

Josephites are urging the Senate to look at the evidence on the ground and listen more fully to the experience Aboriginal people have had of living with the Intervention. Only in this way can the Government ensure that both the requirements of the Racial Discrimination Act are honoured, and that any new legislation restores to Aboriginal people the rights they ought to enjoy as citizens of this nation.

With many Australians, indigenous and non-Indigenous, we urge the government to work for justice and engage in meaningful partnerships with Aboriginal communities,' Sr Anne concluded.

2 May, 2012