

27 June 2011

The Hon Jenny Macklin MP,
Minister for Families, Housing Community Services and
Indigenous Affairs,
Parliament House,
Canberra, ACT.

Dear Minister,

We note on 22 June, the release of *Stronger Futures* discussion paper which sets out a new round of consultations/conversations with Aboriginal people at public meetings in Regional Centres and in Communities.

We also note that there are contained in *Stronger Futures* a series of issues to which there are questions attached, 33 in all, which will guide the consultations. This document of 28 pages including the questions, is provided to Aboriginal communities in the English language.

For these consultations to mark the beginning of a new era of cooperation, it seems to us that these critical questions, through which Government hopes to determine the views of the people, should be provided in languages common to the five Regions of consultation and in hard copy for the purpose of circulation to those living in homelands and without computer access. Government should be responsible for ensuring that all communities have copies of the discussion paper well in advance of any consultations.

It is understood from the Department that the itinerary for these consultations is not yet available. However it is our understanding that it is intended that they will commence within a matter of days. If this is so this would clearly be unfair and counterproductive. We consider it essential to provide a minimum of one month before commencing such consultations in order to enable community leaders to hold discussions with their people, some of whom will be required to travel considerable distances.

We also consider that it is essential for consultations to be translated through competent interpreters and for the necessary material to be made available well in advance of their commencement.

Further, we consider that such consultations should all be recorded and be available for public perusal to ensure their transparency. There is already a perception, arising from the perceived inadequacy of earlier consultations, that the Government's approach to consultations is simply an

exercise designed to achieve an already determined outcome. We think that it would be most unfortunate if these consultations were to be considered as falling within the same category.

A media release has today been issued by former Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser, addressing the issue. Please see attached.

We are asking, Minister, that there is a new approach to engagement with Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory which takes into account language barriers, the inability of many to read the written language, and the overall problems of communication. We understand that already suggestions have been made by Rev Dr Djiniyini Gondarra OAM for changing the environment of the communication and we ask you to take those suggestions into account. It is important to all Australians that these consultations are conducted in the spirit of cooperation.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Alastair Nicholson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and 'N'. The background is a light, textured grey.

Alastair Nicholson AO

And on behalf of: Professor Jon Altman, Rev. Shayne Blackman, Catholic Religious Australia (180 congregations), Rev. Dr. Djiniyini Gondarra OAM, Most Rev Philip Freier, Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne, Hon. Paul Guest QC, Michele Harris OAM, Rosalie Kunoth Monks OAM, Rev Alistair Macrea, President of the Uniting Church of Australia, Assoc. Professor Sarah Maddison, Dr. Jeff McMullen AM, Graeme Mundine, George Newhouse, Peter Norden SJ AO, Sisters of Charity of Australia, Sisters of Saint Joseph, Brother Paul Smith AM, Nerida Tinkler RSM, President Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia, Carmel Heagerty RSM Justice Coordinator, Hon Ian Viner AO QC,