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Karen Struthers
MP Member for Algeester
Parliament House
George St
Brisbane QLD 4000

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LEGAL, CONSTITUTIONAL AND
ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW
COMMITTEE

Hands on Parliament

Dear Ms Struthers,

I have previously worked for the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) during the ATSI elections as a Community Electoral Information Officer (CEIO). In this position I saw first hand the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities view on the electoral process. I will outline some of those views below and some possible solution to those views:

1. Indifference to the election process.
2. Lack of education of the electoral process
3. Lack of awareness of candidates
4. Lack of credible candidates
5. Sovereignty issues
6. Negative media to the election process
7. Not enrolled
8. Lack of A&TSI staff at polling places

The issues are fairly broad and needs a solution both from the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments. The Commonwealth should look at the education programs they ran in the late 1980s early 1990s. In this program the AEC had staff visiting Aboriginal & Torres Strait communities throughout the state. They spoke to Secondary schools and community groups in an attempt to get A&TSI people involved in the political process. This was a hard sell but I believe the time given to this project was not sufficient to allow for its success.

The support received from the Queensland Electoral Commission for this project was minimal. The perception from both electoral authorities was and to some extent still is that we do our own thing. The solution would be for a more co-ordinated approach by both to the issue. This co-ordinated approach would address item 1,2,6,7,8 listed above.

The other issues to do with candidates would be an issue for the various political parties to address. They also lack the numbers when it comes to recruiting A&TSI people in the political process. I do not think that parties see the A&TSI vote as a significant enough vote to influence the make-up of Parliament. This perception could change as the Northern Territory election has shown.

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It would be mistake of any political party does not maintain an awareness of the changing face of an electorate. More A&TSI children are growing up in areas with other minority groups. These groups are switching on to the political process and this influence could extend to A&TSI teenagers. Elections have long been perceived as the domain of the white Australian male. The parties have only recently, (1980,s1990s) looked at the influence of women to the election process. A&TSI people should be viewed as another element in the electoral landscape.

The sovereignty issue is one that will always be an emotional issue for A&TSI people. We will always view ourselves as a sovereign group with or without a treaty. This would mean that there would be an element that did not want to participate in the electoral process because of this belief. They would view the establishment of an A&TSI assembly or dedicated seats as part of the answer. They could also view it as a sell out of their sovereignty struggle.

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