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LEGAL, CONSTITUTIONAL AND
ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW
COMMITTEE

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**SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES' PARTICIPATION IN QUEENSLANDS
DEMOCRATIC PROCESS**

I begin this submission by noting the first sentence of the chair's foreward in the issues paper on this matter.

It says: "For democracy to work properly it is important that the voices of all citizens are heard when decisions about laws and government policies are made."

In my submission this is self-evident. It is also my submission that any action to impose arbitrary controls on whose voice is heard and how, is an assault on the essential nature of democracy.

I further submit that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Queensland do already have clear and direct influence in the development of laws and government policies through the race-specific Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy.

This represents an enormous investment on the part of the people of Queensland in providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their issues with a dedicated department that aims to "*improve the cultural, economic, physical and social well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders by creating effective alliances and partnerships with other Government agencies and community groups.*" (DATSIP website)

In relation to possible strategies for enhancing political participation:

The argument that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are under represented (3per cent of the population but only 1 State MLA and 1 Senator) begs the imposition of an upper limit, ie, not more than 3 per cent.

Given the size of the Queensland Parliament, this would mean, if representation was instituted on the proportion of the population that was Indigenous, there would be a maximum of two or three such MPs permitted.

This is inequitable. Parties should be free to pre-select on the basis of merit and electors should have every opportunity to select from the best possible candidates.

If that results in less than 3 per cent indigenous representation, so be it. If it results in more than 3 per cent, then equally, so be it.

I point out that since it came into existence, Pauline Hanson's One Nation has stood Indigenous candidates in Western Australian and the Northern Territory. This has been on the basis of merit as demonstrated through the pre-selection process.

It is the only appropriate basis on which the matter should be addressed. As Pauline Hanson's One Nation has consistently argued, everyone should be treated on an equal basis. This applies particularly on the matter of democratic representation.

Core democratic principles will be severely compromised if the process by which the candidates are selected is arbitrarily skewed, be it on the basis of race, gender, religion, age, sexuality or any of the many other groupings into which our society is fracturing.

The suggestion a representative body based on race should have direct input is unacceptable, because such a body intentionally excludes the wider community from its constituency, while being granted influence over the governing of that wider community.

Worse, it would not in any way be accountable to the wider community, as its constituency was specially exclusive of all but its own special-interest group – however worthy that interest group may or may not be.

It is unfortunate that the performance of likely organisations has been the centre of long debate, both among their own constituents and the wider community.

It is not unreasonable to consider, therefore, that “representative” groups could operate in a far from representative manner.

I submit that it is possible, if not likely, that the existence of such representative groups in fact adds to the barriers between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the general democratic government of the State.

In essence, on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues members of those communities are expected to go to ATSIC or another such group, rather than accessing the normal methods available to all (ie local MLA, contacting Minister's offices, petitions etc).

I submit that the existence of ATSIC and other such bodies works against the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the normal political processes of Queensland.

The establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Assembly will not, in my submission, provide any greater chance of effective representation than the above proposal to have a representative group with direct input.

If anything, it would essentially create the same situation, including the further exclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the normal democratic processes, while carrying the substantial additional financial burden of having to create that representative group (the proposed assembly) just so it could then have input.

Dedicated Indigenous seats are, possibly, the worst of all proposals. They will not be seen as "real" seats because the candidates for those seats will be restricted, the people voting for them will have constrained choices, and those holding those seats will be, essentially, nothing more than special interest lobbyists.

I submit there is also the possibility of those seats, conversely, holding the balance of power (as was the case with the seat of Nicklin in the previous Parliament).

In that circumstance, I submit the governing of the state being conducted on the basis of approval from representatives chosen on a racial-restrictive basis is undemocratic at best..

I submit that the issue surrounding the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is only part of a broader issue, and that is the responsibility of Government to ensure that all sectors of society have the necessary tools with which to engage in the democratic process.

I submit that in the interests of equity and democracy, if any action is taken it be action which enhances *every* person's capacity to participate.

I submit for example, that consideration be given to the introduction as a compulsory subject during schooling, of an enhanced study of government, its processes, and of methods of participation.

I submit that such studies particularly focus on practical, legitimate methods of participation, from Letter-To-The-Editor campaigns to representations to local MPs, from deputations to Ministers to participation in public consultation activities such as this Inquiry and to standing as candidates in Local, State or Federal elections, either as a member of a party or as an independent.

I submit that the greater engagement of the wider community is the only avenue which properly addresses the principles and tenets of democracy.

I also submit such an enhanced educational effort will address not only State level representation, but local and Federal representation.

In the context of this Inquiry, which is race-specific, I submit that the most democratic method for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is to encourage their interest in participating in the established democratic processes, and to add their input into the tried and proven methods of governance which have stood, and continue to stand, this State and this nation in good stead.

I further submit that any political party which has a belief that one sector or another of society deserves an undemocratic level of representation can make its own decision to allocate one or more "safe" seats to members of whichever sector of society they desire.

The final decision on who represents the people of this state in its processes of government should always reside with all the people of Queensland.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Rosa Lee Long', written in a cursive style.

Rosa Lee Long MP
Member for Tablelands.