



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

MEDIA RELEASE

WHY THE CONTINUING GAP?

SISTERS OF ST JOSEPH QUESTION THE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN 'STRONGER FUTURES LEGISLATION' AND THE GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO TRUST AND RESPECT?

The Sisters of St Joseph continue to question the government's proposed expansion of compulsory income management, its punitive welfare policy, and the pursuit of SEAM, which purportedly aims to improve school enrolments and attendance.

Speaking as a Leader of the Sisters of St Joseph right across Australia, Sr Anne Derwin expressed the disappointment that many Australians are also expressing at this time.

'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

Following ongoing consultations with Aboriginal communities with whom they are involved, and after making submissions to Government regarding their concerns about the legislation, a number of Sisters joined with their aboriginal colleagues to travel to Canberra this week to take part in the rally opposing the new legislation. Many Sisters of St Joseph live and work beside Aboriginal people and many belong to a vibrant Reconciliation Circle in Adelaide.

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

Sisters of St Joseph beg the government to look at the evidence on the ground and listen to the experience Aboriginal people have of living with the Intervention. Only in this way can our 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.

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