



# KERRY O'BRIEN

LABOR SENATOR FOR TASMANIA

SHADOW MINISTER FOR RECONCILIATION AND INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS  
SHADOW MINISTER FOR TOURISM, REGIONAL SERVICES AND TERRITORIES

22 June 2004

Sister Sharon Price RSM  
Executive Director  
CLRI (NSW)  
PO Box 259  
ROSEBERY 1445

Dear Sister Price

Thank you for your letter dated 4 June 2004 concerning the Howard Government's decision to abolish the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC).

The government has ignored the recommendations of its own \$1 million ATSIC Review and elected to deny Indigenous Australians the opportunity to inform policy or participate in program design and delivery.

In addition to dismantling the elected representative structure for Indigenous Australians, the government has decided to centralise indigenous programs in Canberra. This latter decision has been made despite the demonstrable failure of 'mainstream' agencies to improve health, education and other outcomes for Indigenous Australians during the Howard Government's term of office.

Unlike the Howard Government, Federal Labor believes Indigenous Australians have a right to determine who speaks for them and a right to inform the development of programs delivered in their communities.

A Latham Labor Government will abolish ATSIC, but will create a new democratic national indigenous representative body with important advisory, advocacy and accountability functions. Additionally, Labor will devolve responsibility for decision-making about regional indigenous programs to new regional indigenous bodies.

On 16 June 2004 Labor successfully moved to establish a Senate Select Committee to inquire into the provisions of the government's *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Amendment Bill 2004*, the mainstreaming of indigenous programs and related matters.

Advice on making submissions to the Select Committee will soon be published on the Parliament House website ([www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au)) and will also be available from Mathew Jose in my Canberra office. I hope the Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes in New South Wales will consider making a submission to the inquiry.

Thank you for writing to me about this important matter.

Yours sincerely

**Kerry O'Brien**

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