



**Office of the Hon Mal Brough MP**  
**Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs**  
**Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs**

*Parliament House*  
*CANBERRA ACT 2600*

*Telephone: (02) 6277 7560*  
*Facsimile: (02) 6273 4122*

Dear Correspondent,

Thank you for your letter to the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Mal Brough MP about the protection of children in the Northern Territory from sexual abuse. The Minister has noted your views, in particular your comments about the Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the Northern Territory (CAO). The Minister has asked me to respond on his behalf and I would like to provide you with some clarification.

CAO is not a representative body, that is, it is not elected by Aboriginal people at large, and can't assume authority to speak on behalf of Aboriginal people more broadly. If anything, it is a political alliance of organisations, many of whom rely on taxpayer funds to exist, that has resolved to speak against the Emergency Response in the NT. Several self appointed spokespeople were part of or have strong connections to the former ATSIC and still argue against ATSIC's abolition (indeed some seek the restoration of an ATSIC like body). Regrettably, some of the people involved are fighting broader political issues that should not be used to frustrate an intervention designed to protect children from abuse and to provide them with better opportunities.

Any person in Australia has a right to express a view. On various issues the Australian Government continues to seek the input of some of the groups that are part of the CAO – for example the Land Councils still have responsibilities under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act. Nonetheless, it is not surprising that some people who feel their preferred programs, funding sources or positions of power might be affected by the Emergency Response might seek to oppose change. Further, it is not a surprise that some interested groups might argue for more money for their preferred programs, despite widespread concern that many of those older programs have not helped the problems that children are affected by.

The Australian Government took the view that the circumstances highlighted in the *Little Children are Sacred Report* warranted a firm and decisive response and a departure from the old ways of delivering indigenous programs that had demonstrably failed in this case.

While the Australian Government does seek to engage with local people and constructive groups, the information being promoted by spokespeople for CAO is neither helpful nor constructive. Reliance on terms like 'land grab' and 'genocide' are completely unfounded and mischievous especially in the context of significant efforts to provide more safety and a better economic future for children that have been failed by the old ways of doing things.

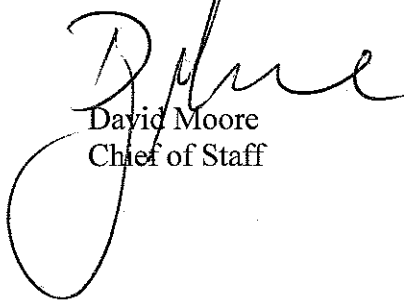
In relation to the decision to lease townships for five years, it is important to note that the leader of the Federal Opposition has been forced to acknowledge the link between poor housing conditions, child abuse and the need for these temporary leases.

If you would like more factual information about the Response there is a comprehensive range of Fact Sheets and information at [www.facsia.gov.au/nter/](http://www.facsia.gov.au/nter/).

If Aboriginal people are to be liberated from abuse, poverty and despair local people must be assisted toward economic independence and empowered to make their own decisions and to talk directly to government. This is why consultation about the Emergency Response will mainly be at local level, notwithstanding the fact that from time to time the Australian Government will continue to deal with some of the groups involved in CAO.

Please note that as we have received multiple emails of a standard campaign letter on this subject, this standard response is the most practical way of responding. Thank you for bringing your views to the Minister's attention.

Yours Sincerely,



David Moore  
Chief of Staff