

The Secretary,
Legislative Scrutiny Committee,
Darwin, NT.

Dear Secretary,

On behalf of the Church leaders of the Catholic Church of Wadeye, I write to express our deep concern regarding the proposed amendments to the Care and Protection of Children legislation.

We believe that matters as serious as this and with so much at stake regarding our children's future are best done in dialogue and consultation with the Aboriginal leaders of communities most effected.

We are aware of children from Wadeye, for many years now, taken into out of home care.

We are unaware of any consultation with the community of Wadeye regarding the changes proposed.

We have experiences and thoughts worth offering to those who want to pass this legislation on how to make our children safer.

We recommend that before any further steps are taken to implement the policies proposed that there be much wider consultation with our community and for that matter other Aboriginal communities in the NT.

A point worth remembering, for those who want to make the safety of Aboriginal children uppermost in the legislation, is that the most effective way to make Aboriginal children safe is to engage with the Aboriginal leaders and families in the communities.

We are aware of a number of respected Aboriginal organisations that have the wellbeing of our children as their priority and who have in recent days expressed serious concerns about this proposed legislation.

It is a matter of concern to us that the NT Government appears to dismiss their concerns and does not engage with them as it attempts to make children safe.

We believe that the NT Government needs to have a better relationship with these organisations and for that matter remote Aboriginal communities if it wants to seriously make our children safer.

We are particularly concerned that the legislation will weaken the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle which gives protections designed to keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children connected to family, culture and community.

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We believe in the importance of keeping our children connected to our families, our culture, our language and our community at Wadeye. It is important that our children know Murrinhpatha language.

When a child can't stay at home, we believe that it is important that they are placed with people who keep them connected to the community and that they have family connections that they already know and feel safe with.

The children from Wadeye in out of home care in Darwin visit their families from time to time here at Wadeye.

Any watering down of that practice in the legislations is a serious concern for us.

We believe it is in the interest of the long term wellbeing of our children that they are able to return to Wadeye for funerals, church ceremonies and cultural events. If this does not take place the children will suffer and lose their sense of belonging and connection.

As a Church with a long history in the NT we do not want to return to past practices when we as non Aboriginal thought we knew what was best for Aboriginal people without asking Aboriginal people what was the best way forward.

We hope that the current NT Government might show the seriousness with which it is promoting child safety by finding solutions with Aboriginal communities.

Yours sincerely

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of Fr Leo Wearden.

Fr Leo Wearden msc

Parish Priest Wadeye NT