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### Rushed process condemned

UnitingCare Wesley condemns the Federal Government's decision to rush far-reaching changes to Aboriginal rights and welfare through Parliament without proper scrutiny and genuine debate.

Reverend Peter McDonald of UnitingCare Wesley said: "Everyone agrees that it is of critical importance to protect children from harm. However the Government's refusal to allow reasonable time for the proposed legislation to be scrutinised may well exacerbate long-term injustice, racial discrimination and serious disadvantage."

UnitingCare Wesley has particular concerns about the way the Federal Government has made its decision to remove the Northern Territory permit system.

In October 2006, the Government released a discussion paper canvassing proposed changes to the permit system. The Government received nearly 100 submissions but has not reported on the findings of that review.

"The Federal Minister keeps calling for openness and greater transparency and yet he has refused to be open and transparent around his review of the permit system," Rev McDonald said.

"Parliament and the Australian public have a right to know who is pushing for the permit system to be removed. Many remote communities, as well as the Northern Territory police, believe the system is vital for community wellbeing. Removing the permit system will make it much harder to stop the trafficking of alcohol, drugs and pornography."

Last month, UnitingCare Wesley asked the Minister to release all of the submissions received so that debate about the proposed changes could be properly informed.

"I am extremely disappointed that the Federal Minister hasn't responded to our request," Rev McDonald said, "Minister Brough's review concluded five months ago and yet all he's released is a one-page fact sheet."

"If the Minister is sincere about the need for greater transparency, then he needs to lead by example."

#### Further comment

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