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New ATSI Representative Body has a voice

ACT Greens MLA Deb Foskey amended the ACT Government's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Representative Body Bill today to ensure that the Body can address issues of public interest and is not require to only report to government.

"The Representative Body will have a wide ranging role in regard to the interest and well being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT" Dr Foskey said today.

"My amendments have made it explicit that the Body can make its view known to the general public, including its views on Government policy."

"Many people in Canberra's Indigenous community have pointed out to me that a body such as this can be seen as a toothless tiger."

"The Assembly has supported my amendment which makes it clear that the Body has the teeth to speak for itself."

"This Bill, as presented, did not make the independence of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Representative Body clear, although some would argue it was implied."

"However, too many advisory and consultative bodies in Canberra are required to report only to their Minister, which can result in community expertise being coopted and silenced. It was for that reason I moved amendments to ensure there can be no argument about its independence."

"This amendment was supported by all members in the Assembly. I trust future governments will remain committed to empowering Indigenous people and be prepared to takes criticisms from this Body on the chin, to listen and respond; and not do a John Howard and abolish it" Dr Foskey said.

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