

Budget Submission on the Stolen Wages Issue

Stolen Wages Working Group, January 2005

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Between 1897 and approximately 1984 many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders were affected by successive government's control over their wages and savings. Monies never paid to workers and their families are referred to as "stolen wages".

The Queensland Government was the first Australian government to offer a reparations package for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders affected by these practices.

It is desirable that a stronger mechanism be found for recognition of missing, unpaid and underpaid wages and for determining a way of making recompense to the workers affected or, where those workers have since passed on, to their families or descendants.

The 2004 State Labor Platform supports the re-establishment of a formal consultation process and the proper compensation of those who had wages removed from them, notwithstanding any financial reparations already paid.

It is widely believed that compensation is owing to eligible claimants should be paid under the following categories:-

1. Account of monies held in the Aboriginal Protection of Property Account;
2. Unlawful enslavement;
3. Breach of Fiduciary Duty;
4. Unlawful Statutory Deductions; and
5. Human Rights violations.

There has been social consequences for later generations of people affected by these practices and a need for further agreements and policy considerations such as reconciliation and a commitment to negotiation.

It is believed payment of reparations to individual Claimants by way of compensation for the injustices imposed under the protection regime should be divided as follows:

Persons who worked 5 years or less

Persons who worked more than 5 years but less than 10 years

Persons who worked more than 10 years but less than 15 years

Persons who worked more than 15 years but less than 20 years

Persons who worked more than 20 years

Dollar amounts should take into account the need to balance the interests of Claimants with Government budgetary constraints and are believed to range from amounts between \$180 million and \$500 million. Sufficient allocation will need to be made for the period beyond 31 December 2005 and into 2006. Allocations need to be made for 2006 and beyond until proper reparations are made.

It is important to keep in mind that many Claimants worked under the Protection Acts for many years. The work often involved carrying out laborious tasks for long hours with minimal, if any, pay. The compensation is for the blatant exploitation and control by the Queensland Government in relation to Indigenous labour, over many years.

In order for justice to be done and to 'be seen to be done' in the communities, it is important that persons who served for many years under the Act receive larger sums of compensation than those who worked for shorter periods. In terms of justice, it is only fair that someone who worked many years be paid a greater amount than a person who worked perhaps just one year.

It is also important to current claimants to the \$55.6 million existing offer that no further money is to be placed into trust.

In the immediate financial year the following financial and departmental resources are sought (see Schedule I):

Resources sought from DATSIP (internally):

- . Co-Coordinate Regional Forums in conjunction with the Stolen Wages Working Group Executive Committee
- . Meet the costs of Regional Forums
- . Costs of public information campaigns
- . Development and maintenance of Community website
- . Costs of producing a bimonthly newsletter for stakeholders

Resources sought from DATSIP (independently):

- . Administration Officers position 12 -18 months
- . Support Admin Officer position 12 -18 months
- . Travel and accommodation costs for Administration Officer and Stolen Wages Working Group Executive Committee

Resources that can be sought 'in kind' (or need to be supported by DATSIP):

- . Office rental x 12 - 18 months
- . Office equipment and resources i.e. fax, computers furniture x 12 - 18 months
- . General administration costs including insurance postage, phone, fax and internet costs

Role of Administrative Officer

From within DATSIP there is a need to:

- . Establish linkages and networks throughout the Indigenous Communities and with Government agencies to provide information and advice on the Stolen Wages issues
- . Provide authoritative advice, reports and administrative support to the Stolen Wages Executive Committee

Independently of DATSIP there is a need to:

- . Provide information and support to claimants and stakeholders
- . Manage and co-ordinate the human, physical and financial resources within the office
- . Co-ordinate and prepare papers, reports, briefs and correspondence for SWWG
- . Coordinate creation and distribution of information material
- . Develop and maintain databases
- . Coordinate SWWG Meetings
- . Prepare minutes and all associated material needed for Meetings

Objectives of (independent) Administration Position

- . Be contact point for all Claimants, Government Departments, Media, and general public
- . Identify and monitor emerging policy issues and trends that impact on the Stolen Wages issue
- . To manage the daily administration of Stolen Wages campaign and the Stolen Wages Office
- . Provide support to Stolen Wages claimants and their families

Consultation & Information Distribution

Objectives/scope of State wide community consultations in each region of Queensland

- . Evolve a shared vision - for a planning framework for the future development of resolving the Stolen Wages issue
- . Distribute information about the issue, background, current status, and latest developments
- . Acknowledge views and concerns expressed by claimants, community and other stakeholders
- . Seek information relating to community views and concerns
- . Examine and test the concerns of the community against the information and advice
- . Provide recommendations to the Government based on information and advice
- . Keep the community informed about the Group's activities and report on a regular basis
- . Create a database of claimants contacts

Information distribution

- . Face to face community meetings
- . Public Awareness stalls at major Indigenous events
- . Multimedia campaigns including radio, television, internet and press
- . Newsletter distributed to database

Sources:

QAILSS (2002): Document prepared for the purposes of negotiations, containing the demands of claimants in relation to the savings accounts and wages project.

Stolen Wages Working Group meetings and consultations 2002-2004 including 'Stolen Wages Campaign Resourcing Needs' submitted to the Department of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Policy on 15 December 2004 and a Draft Negotiation Process Agreement (yet to be tabled).

Queensland Labor - State Platform Document - 2004