



NT Working Women's Centre

**Submission to the Legal and Constitutional References
[Senate] Committee:
Inquiry into Indigenous Workers Whose Paid Labour Was
Controlled By Government [Stolen Wages]**

Submission Made by the NT Working Womens Centre.
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The NT Working Women's Centre are concerned that the extent of this issue in the NT remains unknown. It is vital that information is gathered about how many Territorians were and are effected, and about what missing, unpaid and underpaid wages, savings and other benefits (stolen wages) are and were held by Governments. It is also vital that we understand how these monies where held and what has happened to these monies. We understand that advocacy around this issue in QLD has revealed the extent of the issue there and are concerned it is a great unknown in the NT, which presumably was affected. Information gathered about the extent of this issue in the NT needs to be made publicly available so that services such as ours can educate affected people and their families.

We are unaware of any NT government enquiry into how Indigenous monies were managed in the NT, or even how Indigenous women in the NT may be able to access records showing any money owing to them. Any recommendations that come out of this enquiry with regard to how and where these records should be kept need to take into accounts the large

number of affected people, and their families, that live in extremely remote, sometimes inaccessible communities in the NT. Many affected people and their families do not speak English as a second [or third, or fourth] language and may not be literate in English. Any record keeping system needs to be centralised, simple to access and cover workers right across Australia.

It is also imperative that this inquiry look into who or what protected these workers from being physically and sexually abused and/or mistreated at work under so-called 'protection laws'. From anecdotal evidence we understand that workers, particularly women were abused in their workplaces and that there were inadequate grievance procedures, and a fundamental lack of equality that prevented them from reporting this abuse.

The NTWWC believes that all people have the right to be paid money for the work performed by them. The NTWWC believes that if it is shown that money was withheld from Indigenous workers it should be repaid to those workers or surviving family if they have died.

It is imperative that this senate enquiry is the beginning of a process. We need a national forum to talk about how the money earned by Indigenous Australians was controlled by others and what the effects of these controls were.