

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

The Government of Queensland has responded to a campaign to restore unpaid wages to Indigenous workers with strategies designed to reduce to a minimum the amount the Government will have to part with. These strategies the Government describes collectively as "an act of reconciliation" which includes

A stingy ceiling imposed on the amount payable regardless of the amount actually earned by a worker

A requirement that workers forfeit any payment due to them if above this ceiling

An arbitrary decision to exclude the descendants and families of those workers from access to their forebears' pay

Persistently referring publicly to these wages as "taxpayers' money"

A prolonging of the process, making an economic convenience of the advanced age of those surviving workers who are close to their deaths

Placing the burden of proof on elderly, frail, poor and uneducated people in the context of the Government's abysmal record keeping and ancillary corruption

Offering the alternative option that these people are invited to take the Queensland Government to court

These proposals the Government also dubs its "offer" and as act of reconciliation the offer plainly speaks for itself. Incredibly these measures are meant to address an *acknowledged* injustice. What is not being acknowledged is the effect of a five generation long act of theft on the wealth and wellbeing of the Indigenous people of this country. This has been acknowledged in both the USA and Canada respect to their Indigenous peoples; the situation in Australia is identical:

Records of the Government's management of its trust should be readily available especially to the supposed beneficiaries of that trust. The Government's responsibility is to compensate those people for whom it acts as a trustee when the Government's own failures in the maintenance of its records result in losses to those people – people who have lost not just their pay but also the avenues by which it could be retrieved.

