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SUBMISSION RE STOLEN WAGES

"From 1904 to 1987 the Queensland Government withheld or underpaid wages earned by Aboriginal workers. (<http://www.eniar.org/action/stolen.html>)

This is an appalling situation which makes me hang my head in shame as a Queenslander.

I understand that the Beatty Government in 2002 made an offer of \$55.6 million to pay \$4,000.00 to some people and \$2000.00 to others. Furthermore, the Government has not acknowledged any entitlement on the part of heirs of the people whose wages were withheld or underpaid and has made it a requirement of acceptance that no further claim be made. Such an entitlement is accepted as normal practice in our society and, particularly in the case of people who are already deprived, is a necessary help towards freeing our Indigenous People of the blight of inherited poverty.

Given that Racial Discrimination Laws were passed in 1975, the Government's failure to pay at legally operating rates during the period between then and 1987 is clearly in breach of the law as well as being totally immoral.

My understanding is that the NSW Government has promised to fully reimburse money still owing, at today's value, there is no demand to surrender legal rights, and both direct and descendant claimants are eligible. This is what should be done without delay in Queensland.

Australia is enjoying a period of economic prosperity, and, in particular, Queensland is profiting from a boom in demand for its rich minerals reserves. Even if this were not the case, we are still duty bound to pay debts lawfully incurred, especially when these are owing to the most vulnerable in our community. This is not a matter of bountiful largesse, it is a matter of social justice.

Any decent society looks after those who are most vulnerable. But this is not a matter of welfare, it is a matter of social justice and whatever steps need to be taken to rectify this injustice should be taken without delay.

Sr Janice Howard OSU

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