

SUBMISSION from Ruth Bence

Re: Extension of Income Management – Stronger Futures in the NT Bill 2011

The extension of the Income Management Program in terms of period of time, geographic areas covered, etc. is bad policy for the following reasons:

1. An evaluation of Income Management has not been conducted to determine its effectiveness. The expenditure of large sums of tax payers' money on the implementation of a controversial program, before completing a respectable and rigorous evaluation, is both socially and economically unwise.
2. The blanket inclusion in the program of all people living within specified areas who receive particular kinds of welfare payments, regardless of their capacity to manage their own affairs, is discriminatory. That the geographic areas chosen to be income managed predominantly contain people of Aboriginal descent heightens the discriminatory nature of the policy.
3. A policy that discriminates against entire classes of people according to their welfare recipient status and their place of residence is not a policy that can be associated with a free and fair democratic country.
4. The policy is flawed in its approach. It encourages learned helplessness and dependency on government, which the children of families under income management will assimilate. Those with the skills to manage their own affairs will lose them. It contains few if any capacity development measures. It places individuals and families under the pressure of government-imposed stigma and close government control leading to mental health issues and increased likelihood of family breakdown. It leaves participants with the hopeless and debilitating prospect of no end in sight. The only way out is to leave their community or to ask for an exemption which involves a tortuous process and little likelihood of being granted.
5. A combined targeted and voluntary income management program would enable cases of chronic dysfunction to be effectively supported as part of a suite of services and provide for those who choose to be income managed.

As an Australian citizen I am offended by this discriminatory Bill and deeply troubled that fellow citizens already suffering economic and social disadvantage are being treated as second class by the Federal Government of this country. The form of income management being adopted has seemingly been devised and approved by people with good intentions but essentially negative underlying sentiments and estimations of those within the program's reach and little insight into what it takes to enable people to thrive.

The many millions of dollars being expended on Income Management would be far better spent on a long-term program of community development, implemented

community by community following initial selection of, say, six communities, two each at low, medium and high levels of functionality, to gain experience and understanding of how to work successfully in partnership with communities to meet their different aspirations and wishes regarding their lives. One size does not fit all and 'top-down' does not work.

Ruth Bence