

Questions on Notice: Senator Lidia Thorpe

Associate Professor Klein

1. What is your view of the Family Responsibilities Commission model, which fundamentally still facilitates non-voluntary income management, despite all calls from experts and the community?

- I have not seen much in the way of research that examines the effectiveness of income management within the FRC. In the 2012 *Cape York Welfare Reform Evaluation* carried out by FaHCSIA back in 2012, the evaluators argued that “the evidence suggests that the impact of the local FRC Commissioners is in their listening, guiding and supporting role, rather than in the exercising of their punitive powers to order income management” (FaHCSIA 2012: 50). This evaluation suggests that any ‘success’ (not clear how that is measured) is in the supportive role of the commissioners not IM. I have not seen any research that examines just IM used in the FRC alone though.
- My main point here though is that the FRC is NOT a model for the government to pursue elsewhere – they government has tried already and has failed. This is for two reasons:
 - 1) the FRC was set up with huge amounts of state and federal government support and funds – including making it a statutory body.
 - 2) Most importantly, the Federal government tried to copy this kind of model with the Cashless Debit Card trials in Ceduna and the East Kimberley. The community panels were a disaster – leading to the scrapping of this aspect of the CDC trials early on. The government has no capacity emulate the FRC – they have already shown this through the CDC trials. Sarouche Razi and I wrote about this [here](#) but said the following:

“For people who were put on the card, they had an option to present a case to a community panel to reduce the amount quarantined from 80% down to 50%, but not take people off the card. To do this, people on the card had to present their case to the community panel¹.

¹ A vague process was developed by DSS where an individual can seek a social worker to assess their case and, if the assessment shows severe impacts to their wellbeing, can make recommendations to DSS for the individual to be removed from the trial. It is not clear the exact number of people that have been successful through this process, but the number is low given the number of people on the trial has not reduced significantly.

The panel was not functioning in Kununurra and Wyndham until late 2016. When it was running, government selected members of the Kununurra and Wyndham communities to review a paper application prepared by the individual, and then deliberate and decide on a new amount to be quarantined. In order to submit a case to the panel, the individual on the card was asked to sign a statement allowing community members on the panel, whose identities and interests are undisclosed, access to view personal information such as school attendance, health information, police records and housing records. Bilateral agreements were developed for the sharing of information between the various services. The process required anyone on the Card to disclose personal data to an unspecified 'community' panel, without representation. The panel process assumed that people in the region 'knew' each other, could make fair assessments on each other's lives, without any legal recourse for the individual making the claim.

The ORIMA (2017) evaluation acknowledged that the panel had limited success. Our research also found that it was not clear for many people how the panel worked, who was on the panel, and how people on the card could have legal representation. For example, of the 35 people on the card at the time of our survey, five people knew about the panel, five people had never heard of it and twenty people were not sure if they had heard about it".

Klein, E., & Razi, S. (2017). *The cashless debit card trial in the East Kimberley*. Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research. <https://caepr.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/cashless-debit-card-trial-east-kimberley>

2. We know Income management started with colonial mission managers stealing First Peoples wages, enslaving and controlling First People, which continued with John Howard's apartheid style military and economic invasion of the Northern Territory. The majority of submissions talks about how income management today continues to segregate, discriminate and disadvantage our people, denying our opportunity to lead a dignified, self-determined and healthy life. Do you believe these income management schemes to be incompatible with human rights, and fundamentally discriminatory/racist?

Yes, I do think CIM is fundamentally racist as it disproportionately targets First Nations peoples (and comes from the NTER which only happened because the

government suspended the Racial Discrimination Act) and Andrew Forrest's Aboriginal Employment and Training Review in 2014. Sarouche Razi and I have also written about the way CIM is a continued form of colonial governance attempting Indigenous assimilation. The link to this work is [here](#): (let me know if you have troubles accessing and I can send pdf)

Klein, E. and S. Razi (2018), 'Contemporary Tools of Dispossession: The Cashless Debit Card Trial in the East Kimberley' Journal of Australian Political Economy No. 82, pp. 84 106.

<https://www.ppesydney.net/content/uploads/2020/05/Contemporary-tools-of-dispossession-The-cashless-debit-card-trial-in-the-East-Kimberley.pdf>

3. Would you support a policy move that scrapped all forms of Income Management and instead invested in programs that create real jobs, with proper award wages and conditions, adequate training and skills, and rebuilding local community decision-making?

Yes. Whilst the government is spending millions currently on 'consultation' they are ONLY talking about CIM in these consultations. Why not have other options on the table? CIM does not come from Indigenous communities– it came from NTER and Forrest's Aboriginal Employment and Training Review. Why not let communities speak for themselves and suggest their own ideas beyond CIM (which have always been plenty and great). Indigenous peaks also suggest various other alternatives too – for example APONT's submission to the inquiry.