



Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment (2008 Measures No. 1) Bill 2008

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Social Policy Section

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Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment (2008 Measures No. 1) Bill 2008

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House: House of Representatives

Portfolio: Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Commencement: On Royal Assent

Links: The [relevant links](#) to the Bill, Explanatory Memorandum and second reading speech can be accessed via BillsNet, which is at <http://www.aph.gov.au/bills/>. When Bills have been passed they can be found at ComLaw, which is at <http://www.comlaw.gov.au/>.

Purpose

The Bill amends the *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000* (the Act) to provide funding for 50 additional teachers in 73 Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory in 2008.

Background

Commonwealth assistance to Indigenous education is provided through the *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000*. The current Act provides quadrennium funding for the years 2005–2008, primarily for the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP).

Basis of policy commitment

The Labor Government's policy on Indigenous Affairs is focussed on closing the substantial gaps that exist between the socio-economic outcomes of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population. This is not dissimilar to the former Coalition Government's emphasis on 'practical reconciliation' measures. However the Labor Government envisions such practical measures not as a substitute for the symbolic gestures of reconciliation but rather as following them. In the Prime Minister's speech on the apology he stated:

Australians are a passionate lot. We are also a very practical lot. For us, symbolism is important but, unless the great symbolism of reconciliation is accompanied by an even greater substance, it is little more than a clanging gong. It is not sentiment that makes history; it is our actions that make history. Today's apology, however inadequate, is aimed at righting past wrongs. It is also aimed at building a bridge

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between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians—a bridge based on a real respect rather than a thinly veiled contempt. Our challenge for the future is now to cross that bridge and, in so doing, embrace a new partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians ... the core of this partnership for the future is to closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians on life expectancy, educational achievement and employment opportunities. This new partnership on closing the gap will set concrete targets for the future: within a decade to halve the widening gap in literacy, numeracy and employment outcomes and opportunities for Indigenous children, within a decade to halve the appalling gap in infant mortality rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and, within a generation, to close the equally appalling 17-year life gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous when it comes when it comes to overall life expectancy.¹

During the election campaign in November 2007 the Australian Labor Party announced a range of proposed measures to improve education opportunities for Indigenous students including a promise ‘to increase Indigenous children’s attendance at school’ by funding ‘\$60.6 million over four years for 200 additional teachers for the Northern Territory’.²

The Bill appropriates funding for 50 of the additional 200 teachers. In her second reading speech the Minister, the Hon. Julia Gillard, announced that additional funding of \$56.8 million will be appropriated in subsequent Acts to provide for the total 200 extra teachers in the calendar years 2008 – 2011.³

Recruitment and retention of teachers will be the responsibility of Northern Territory government and non-government education providers. Northern Territory government initiatives to recruit and retain teachers in remote areas include remote area allowances, subsidised housing and travel expenses.⁴

The measure adds to the \$16.0 million in administered expenses for extra teacher workforce capacity and classrooms appropriated from the Education, Science and Training

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1. K. Rudd (Prime Minister) *Apology to Australia’s Indigenous peoples*, [press release](#), 13 February 2008; see also J. Macklin ‘[New start is within our grasp](#)’ *The Australian* 13 February 2008 where the Minister reiterated the targets.
 2. J. Macklin and W. Snowdon [Indigenous Economic Development](#) 5 November 2007
 3. Julia Gillard (Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) [Second Reading Speech: Indigenous Education \(Targeted Assistance\) Amendment \(2008 Measures No. 1\) Bill 2008](#), House of Representatives, *Debates*, 14 February 2008, p. 6.
 4. The Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) offers free airfares to the Territory and back from anywhere in Australia to teachers prepared to sign up for just one term of teaching in the Territory. See: <http://www.teaching.nt.gov.au/>

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portfolio in 2007 as part of the former Government's Northern Territory Emergency Response.⁵

There are 13,792 Indigenous school age (age 5-15) children in the Northern Territory.⁶ The Government estimates that 10,000 of these students live in the 73 remote communities affected by the Northern Territory Emergency Response but only 8,000 are enrolled at school and a further 2,500 enrolled students 'do not attend school for sufficient time to benefit from their educational experience'.⁷ An increase in attendance is anticipated due to the Northern Territory Emergency Response measure that allows the imposition of an Income Management Regime (IMR) if a 'person's child is subject to the 'unsatisfactory attendance at school' situation'.⁸

School attendance is vital if the literacy and numeracy outcomes of Indigenous students are to be improved sufficiently to halve the gap in the literacy and numeracy results of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The most recent National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training states that:

In 2005, the gap between Indigenous and All students ranged from 14 percentage points in Year 3 numeracy to 33 percentage points in Year 7 numeracy, with less than half (49%) of Indigenous students meeting this benchmark.

The Indigenous scores in 2005 are lower than the 2004 scores on eight of the nine benchmarks, and in eight of the nine cases the gaps between Indigenous and All students' outcomes widened between the two years.

With seven years of data available, there is little evidence of sustained overall improvement in the benchmark areas. Gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes have tended to widen and to increase with the age of the students.⁹

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5. Richard Webb and Coral Dow, 'Appropriation (Northern Territory National Emergency Response) Bill (No. 1) 2007-2008 and Appropriation (Northern Territory National Emergency Response) Bill (No. 2) 2007-2008', [Bills Digest, no. 24, Parliamentary Library, Canberra 2007-08.](#)
 6. ABS, 2006 census data
 7. Julia Gillard (Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) [Second Reading Speech: Indigenous Education \(Targeted Assistance\) Amendment \(2008 Measures No. 1\) Bill 2008](#), House of Representatives, *Debates*, 14 February 2008, p. 6.
 8. Peter Yeend and Coral Dow, 'Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Welfare Payment Reform) Bill 2007', [Bills Digest, no. 27](#), Parliamentary Library, 2007-08.
 9. [National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training 2005](#), Canberra, 2007, p.50. The report notes that one factor affecting the fall in Indigenous rates could be the sharp increase in the proportion of eligible students participating in the testing. 2006 national

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Furthermore students living in remote and very remote areas of Australia achieved the benchmarks at significantly lower rates than other students. Many of these students will be those enrolled in schools in the 73 Northern Territory communities.

Financial implications

The Bill will increase appropriations under the Act by \$7.162 million over the 2008 programme year.

Main provisions

Schedule 1 amends subsection 14A (1) of the current Act to reflect the additional funding of \$7.162 million for the period 1 January 2008 to 30 June 2009.

Concluding comments

The Bill partially implements the Government's policy aimed at providing access to education for Indigenous students and working towards halving the gap in literacy, numeracy and employment outcomes. However although the Bill's funding measure is aimed at school age children in remote Northern Territory communities, the student outcomes reported from other parts of remote Australia suggest that targeted initiatives will also be needed beyond the Northern Territory.

benchmark results are available in [National Report on Schooling: Preliminary Paper](#) MCEETYA, 2007.

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