



## Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment (2008 Budget Measures) Bill 2008

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## Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment (2008 Budget Measures) Bill 2008

**Date introduced:** 29 May 2008

**House:** Representatives

**Portfolio:** Education

**Commencement:** 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 purpose of the Bill is to amend the *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000* ('the Act') to appropriate an additional \$8.35 million to fund two Budget measures: an expansion of intensive literacy and numeracy programs and the building of three boarding facilities for Indigenous secondary students in the Northern Territory.

### Background

Commonwealth assistance to Indigenous education is provided through the *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000*. The 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. In the Prime Minister's speech on the apology to Indigenous Australians he stated:

Today's apology, however inadequate, is aimed at righting past wrongs. It is also aimed at building a bridge 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

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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.<sup>1</sup>

During the election campaign in November 2007 the Australian Labor Party announced a range of measures to improve education outcomes of Indigenous students including a promise to expand ‘intensive literacy and numeracy programs in our schools ... the development of individual learning plans for Indigenous students ... and [to] invest in building three new secondary boarding colleges in the Northern Territory at a total cost of \$40.9 million over four years’.<sup>2</sup>

The 2008–09 Budget provides funding to meet these promises. The two measures funded in the Bill are part of a package of 37 measures in various portfolios grouped under the Budget measure ‘Closing the gap for Indigenous Australians’ with total funding of \$718.7 million over five years.<sup>3</sup>

The Budget measure ‘Closing the Gap – contribution to Indigenous boarding colleges’ will provide \$28.9 million over four years towards the construction and operation of three new boarding colleges for Indigenous secondary school students in the Northern Territory. An additional \$15.0 million toward the construction costs will be provided by the Indigenous Land Corporation.<sup>4</sup>

This is not unlike the previous Coalition government’s policy. In the 2007–08 Budget measure ‘A Better Future for Indigenous Australians – opportunities for education’ an additional \$65.3 million was provided over the three years 2006–07 to 2008–09 to repair and replace existing non-government boarding schools in remote and regional areas.<sup>5</sup> The boarding school initiatives of both the former and present government aims at enabling Indigenous students in remote locations to complete their secondary schooling and improve the retention rates of Indigenous students. Although the apparent retention rates

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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. Australian Government, ‘Part 2: Expense Measures’, *Budget Paper No. 2: Budget Measures 2008–09*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2008, p. 299.
  4. *ibid.*, p. 304.
  5. Australian Government, ‘Part 2: Expense Measures’, *Budget Paper No. 2: Budget Measures 2007–08*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2007, p. 164;

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for Indigenous students from Year 7/8 to Year 12 increased in 2007 by 2.8 percentage points to 42.9 per cent they remained much lower than for non-Indigenous students (75.6 per cent).<sup>6</sup>

The Budget measure ‘Closing the Gap—expansion of intensive literacy and numeracy programs and individual learning plans’ provides \$56.4 million over four years most of which will come from the redirection of funds from the 2007–08 Budget measure ‘Realising Our Potential—Summer Schools for Teachers Program’.<sup>7</sup>

The Government aims to halve the gap in the literacy and numeracy results of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students within a decade. 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.

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.<sup>8</sup>

## Financial implications

The Bill will increase appropriations under the Act by \$8.35 million. The Explanatory Memorandum states that after supplementation is applied an ‘additional’ \$9.05 million will be available to implement the two Budget measures. However the Minister’s second

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6. *Schools 2007*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008.

7. Australian Government, ‘Part 2: Expense Measures’, *Budget Paper No. 2: Budget Measures 2008–09*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2008, p. 304.

For the 2007–08 measure see: J. Bishop (Minister for Education, Science and Training), *Rewarding Australia’s high quality teachers*, media release, 8 May 2007, [http://www.dest.gov.au/ministers/bishop/budget07/bud22\\_07.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/ministers/bishop/budget07/bud22_07.htm), accessed on 30 May 2008.

8. *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 benchmark results are available in *National Report on Schooling: Preliminary Paper* MCEETYA, 2007.

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reading speech states the \$8.35 million when indexed ‘will amount to \$9.050 million in 2008 prices’.<sup>9</sup>

## Main provisions

**Schedule 1, item 1** amends subsection 14A(1) to reflect the additional funding of \$8.35 million for the period 1 January 2008 to 30 June 2009.<sup>10</sup>

## Concluding comments

The Bill will provide funding to meet election promises on Indigenous education aimed at closing the gap in educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The comparatively small appropriation reflects the quadrennium funding arrangements. Although the Budget commits \$85.3 million over four years to these two measures, the funds appropriated by this Bill will go into the current quadrennium, and the Explanatory Memorandum states they are intended to cover the period 1 July 2008 to 31 December 2008.<sup>11</sup>

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9. Julia Gillard (Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) [Second Reading Speech: Indigenous Education \(Targeted Assistance\) Amendment \(2008 Budget Measures\) Bill 2008](#), House of Representatives, *Debates*, 29 May 2008, p. 59.
  10. Note that although the heading for section 14A includes the phrase ‘2005 to 2008 quadrennium’, the 2008 appropriation period in the table contained in section 14A actually ends on 30 June 2009.
  11. Explanatory Memorandum, p. 1. However, as also noted by the Explanatory Memorandum, the funds will remain available for expenditure until 30 June 2009. See footnote 10 above.

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