



The Coalition's Policy for Indigenous Affairs

September 2013

Key Points

The Coalition believes indigenous Australians deserve a better future, with more job opportunities, empowered individuals and communities, and higher standards of living.

The Coalition aims to ensure that right around Australia, children go to school, adults go to work and the ordinary law of the land is observed – in indigenous communities no less than in the general community.

The Coalition will establish a Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council, to be chaired by Mr Warren Mundine. The Council will help ensure that the Indigenous programmes achieve real, positive change to the lives of Aboriginal people.

We will transfer responsibility for Indigenous programmes to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Under a Coalition government Australia will, in effect, have a Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs and a dedicated Indigenous Affairs Minister.

All Australian children, but particularly disadvantaged Indigenous children, need access to a proper education. Much more needs to be done in this area. The Coalition will work with the States and Territories to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal children.

Within 12 months of taking office, the Coalition will put forward a draft amendment for constitutional recognition and establish a bipartisan process to assess its chances of success. The key objective of a referendum will be to achieve a unifying moment for the nation, similar to that achieved by the 1967 constitutional referendum.

The Coalition will provide support for Jawun's Empowered Communities initiative, which is a new regionalised model to be applied in eight opt-in communities. Empowered Communities will give more authority to local indigenous leaders with a view to achieving Closing the Gap targets more quickly.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet will review indigenous training and employment programmes to ensure that such programmes are more effectively linked to employment outcomes. This review will be headed by Mr Andrew Forrest.

We will provide up to \$45 million for GenerationOne's demand-driven training model. This commitment, through GenerationOne's Australian Employment Covenant, will train up to 5,000 Indigenous people for guaranteed jobs



Introduction

Education and employment are pathways to prosperity and wellbeing for all Australians.

But too many indigenous Australians, particularly those who live in remote areas, face additional challenges when seeking to access education and employment opportunities.

A good education is a passport to better opportunities and a better life, but it will not be a priority for young people if they think that a life on welfare is all that they can aspire to. There must be opportunities on the horizon to create the personal drive that young people need to succeed in education.

To improve the lives and opportunities of indigenous Australians, we must place greater emphasis on getting children to school and getting adults to work.

Improving the lives and opportunities of indigenous Australians should not be a political issue. It should be an objective shared by all Australians.

The Plan

1. Education

The Coalition will improve educational opportunities for indigenous Australians.

All Australian children, but particularly disadvantaged indigenous children, need access to a proper education. Much more needs to be done in this area.

We will work with the States and Territories to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal children.

a. No excuses approach to school attendance

The Coalition will introduce a 'no excuses' approach to school attendance that will promote greater school attendance, learning and positive social experiences for indigenous Australians.

A responsible government must do more to ensure all Australian children attend school. To do otherwise is to relegate future generations to fewer opportunities, low skilled jobs and welfare dependency.



The School Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM) has been the subject of a trial in eight remote communities in the Northern Territory and Queensland. Under SEAM, if children are not enrolled in school or do not attend school and their parents or carers receive income support, that support may be suspended.

In November 2011 the Government announced that an improved SEAM scheme would be introduced in an additional 17 Northern Territory communities. This does not go far enough. All remote communities with unacceptably low attendance should be able to access SEAM. The Coalition will strengthen SEAM and implement it as an ongoing policy across remote and very remote regions that have attendance problems.

The Coalition will also work with the States and Territories to ensure their truancy laws are enforced.

b. Direct instruction in remote primary schools

The Coalition will commit \$22 million to fund the implementation of Direct Instruction or other proven phonics based models in remote schools across Australia.

Evidence in both Australia and overseas suggests that some teaching methods are more effective than others.¹ There are many benefits of returning to explicit or phonics-centred pedagogy approaches to teaching in the early years.

Programmes that incorporate direct or explicit instruction are being used in some of Australia's highest performing schools² and have turned around student achievement in some of our most disadvantaged schools.³

Our commitment will support a funding pool that will be open to school communities to apply for funding to implement the Direct Instruction programme.

Application for the fund will be conditional on:

- a rigorous school attendance strategy involving families and potentially the broader community;
- the demonstration of a strong commitment by the principal to direct, explicit and systematic teaching of phonics; and
- providing evidence that there is strong community support and the active involvement of parents, teachers and community groups.

The fund size is based on a goal of progressively implementing the programme in remote schools over a 10-year period.

¹ Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005, National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy

² Haileybury, 2012, submission into Senate Inquiry Teaching and Learning (maximising our investment in Australian schools)

³ Coughlin, Cristy, 2011 Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy, the Impact of Direct Instruction Implementation on the Reading Achievement of Cape York Australian Aboriginal Academy Students: A First Year Analysis.



c. Boarding schools and scholarships programme

The Coalition will continue the \$22 million funding in the 2013 Budget to expand boarding school opportunities for Indigenous students through the Indigenous Youth Leadership Programme and the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation. Scholarships would be means tested.

2. Employment

a. Ensure adults go to work

The Coalition believes that the best form of welfare is a job. We also acknowledge the views of many Indigenous elders and other leaders who believe that a culture of passive welfare is destroying many Indigenous families and communities.

We will work with State and Territory governments, the private sector and job services providers to improve employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians, particularly those who live in remote communities.

b. Ensure training leads to jobs

The Coalition is a long standing and vocal supporter of the GenerationOne employment model and we are committed to expanding job opportunities for Indigenous Australians.

We believe that the willingness of major employers to guarantee more than 60,000 jobs to unemployed Indigenous Australians does represent a potential breakthrough and could provide a more effective model for employment services more generally.

Within a month of taking office an incoming Coalition government will appoint Mr Andrew Forrest to head a review into Indigenous employment programmes with a view to ensuring that they are much more effectively linked to employment; and to properly consider innovative proposals backed by the real commitment of employers to finally end the cycle of entrenched Indigenous employment programmes. This review will report to the Prime Minister within six months of a Coalition government taking office.

The Coalition will also provide up to \$45 million as support for the demand-driven training model proposed by GenerationOne. Our commitment will see up to 5,000 Indigenous Australians receive practical training through the GenerationOne model with a guaranteed job at the end.



3. Indigenous Health

The Coalition will work collaboratively with State and Territory Governments, as well as the community health sector through existing national frameworks, to ensure that our efforts to close the Indigenous health gap achieve the real and lasting outcomes that all Australians expect.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health continues to be an urgent priority for the Coalition. We have a long and proud record of improving Indigenous health outcomes and we remain fully committed to achieving health equality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation.

Despite good intent and considerable investment by successive governments, there remains a significant disparity in health outcomes for Indigenous Australians as evident by key indicators such as life expectancy, age-standardised death rates and rates of chronic disease.

Continued investment in clinical health services for all Indigenous Australians will remain a priority for the Coalition. However, the Coalition is also determined to address the social determinants of health that will be key to improving Indigenous health outcomes.

The Coalition has provided in-principle support for Closing the Gap initiatives and will maintain the funding in the Budget allocated to Closing the Gap in Health. We have also committed to a range of initiatives to improve school attendance, employment opportunities and appropriate housing options in remote and Indigenous communities.

4. Housing

The Coalition will work with the States and Territories to remove the barriers to Indigenous Australians owning their own homes, particularly in remote communities.

The great Australian dream of home ownership has for too long eluded Indigenous Australians in many parts of Australia, not only because of lack of finance, but because of restrictive native title laws that don't allow for private home ownership.

5. Recognition

a. Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council

The Coalition will establish a Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council.

The Council will focus on practical changes to improve the lives of Aboriginal people. While many Aboriginal people are fully participating in Australian society, too many are not. Preserving Aboriginal cultures, as well as building reconciliation, means doing more



to ensure that children go to schools, adults go to work and the ordinary rule of the land operates in Aboriginal communities.

The establishment of the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council, to be chaired by Mr Warren Mundine, will help to ensure that the Australian Government's indigenous programmes achieve real, positive change in the lives of Aboriginal people.

The Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council will include indigenous and non-indigenous Australians with a broad range of skills including experience in the public sector, business acumen, and a strong understanding of indigenous culture.

The Council will inform the policy implementation of a new Coalition government.

b. Elevating Commonwealth priority for indigenous affairs

The Coalition will transfer responsibility for Indigenous programmes to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Under a Coalition government Australia will, in effect, have a Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs and a dedicated Indigenous Affairs Minister.

Indigenous issues will be front and centre of a Coalition's policy agenda.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet will ensure greater priority is given to Indigenous affairs in terms of access to mainstream programmes across all agencies.

c. Constitutional recognition

If elected, the Coalition will establish a special committee to progress Constitutional Recognition to be chaired by the Attorney-General, with deputy chairman to include the Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Mr Ken Wyatt AM, the first Indigenous member of the House of Representatives. Senior Indigenous leaders would also sit on the committee.

Within 12 months of taking office, the Coalition will put forward a draft amendment and establish a bipartisan process to assess its chances of success.

The key objective of a referendum will be to achieve a unifying moment for the nation similar to that achieved by the 1967 constitutional referendum.

d. Support for empowered communities

The Coalition will provide \$5 million for the design of a five-year trial of Jawun's Empowered Communities initiative, a new regionalised model to potentially be applied in the eight opt-in communities that already work with Jawun: Cape York, Central Coast of NSW, Inner Sydney, Goulburn Murray, East Kimberley, West Kimberley, APY/NPY Lands and North East Arnhem Land.



A joint Government – Indigenous taskforce will lead the design work for the Empowered Communities model which would be administered by an Indigenous Policy Productivity Council.

Empowered Communities would give more authority to local Indigenous leaders with a view to achieving the Closing the Gap targets more quickly. It is envisaged that no additional funding will be required for Empowered Communities and that it will operate on a pooled funding model, based on current funding in each of the eight regions.

The Choice

The ANAO reports that in 2011 there were 210 Indigenous specific Australian Government programmes and sub-programmes included in its Closing the Gap activities, administered by more than 40 agencies across 17 separate portfolios, with the best estimate of expenditure totalling \$4.2 billion in 2011-12.

Unfortunately, you do not have to look very closely at the Prime Minister's recent report on Closing the Gap to conclude that Labor's approach to Indigenous Affairs has not worked.

While a target for access to preschool programmes appears to have been met, there is no indication that Aboriginal children are availing themselves of these places. The life expectancy gap is stuck stubbornly where it was five years ago. There has been an improvement in the infant mortality rate, but the trend was established under the Howard Government as far back as 1998 and the decline in infant mortality has not accelerated under Labor. Despite all the expenditure on job programmes, unemployment remains unacceptably high. Tragically, a number of the education or NAPLAN indicators are going backwards.

Too many young Indigenous people in remote areas are not attending school and are not able to read or write at anywhere near an acceptable standard. Labor has clearly not done enough to address this.

Economic development on Aboriginal land and land tenure reform has stalled because the Labor Government has no appetite for changing the status quo. They abandoned the Indigenous Home Ownership on Indigenous Land programme because of their complete lack of progress on land tenure reform. Indigenous people in remote areas remain dependent on welfare, have no jobs, no property rights and are over run by bureaucrats; while Labor's priority is the protection of vested interests.

They dropped the ball on the Northern Territory intervention and have replaced it with the self-serving bureaucratic Stronger Futures programme, leaving future generations condemned to a life on welfare.



The failure to properly manage the expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars for remote Indigenous housing under their Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure programme (SIHIP) is an absolute disgrace.

In the end, despite all the money Labor has spent, it will not have achieved its objective of reducing overcrowding in remote communities.

Labor's failure to properly monitor and evaluate Indigenous programmes has led to chronic waste and lost opportunities, a prime example of this is the mismanagement of the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure programme.

Resources meant to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians are being squandered on overlapping and inconsistent services and bloated bureaucracies that disempower local people and their communities.

The Labor Indigenous affairs landscape is littered with bureaucratic failure and incompetence. The ANAO found that the key Australian Government agency responsible for coordination arrangements for Indigenous programmes "is failing to adequately perform its lead agency role and needs to be more proactive at monitoring and reporting on expenditure."

Labor has shown that it has not been prepared to apply the same standards and expectations for Indigenous Australians that it would apply to other Australians. Like Labor's approach to housing, when they set targets and as usual fail to meet them they simply reduce the standard to be achieved.

The result of all this is that after more than six years and lots of money, Labor has not made sufficient inroads into Aboriginal welfare dependency, incarceration rates, overcrowding, poverty or school attendance and achievement.

The Coalition will continue the current level of funding expended on Closing the Gap activities, but will examine these costly programmes to make sure that they are directly working to meet the Closing the Gap targets.

We will take steps to ensure that the people who the programmes and services are intended to assist take advantage of those programmes and services. We would also make sure that programmes are targeted on the basis of need, not race alone, and are delivered in the most effective way possible.

Attending school is an absolute must. Opportunities for employment must be grasped. The Coalition will operate on the principle of offering a hand up rather than a hand out.

The Coalition will make sure that the same standards and the same expectations apply to Indigenous Australians as are applied to other Australians. Importantly, we would not attempt to deny local people the opportunity to solve their own problems.



Cost

The Coalition's *Policy for Indigenous Affairs* will invest \$94 million over the forward estimates in a better future for indigenous Australians.



Hope.
Reward.
Opportunity.



THE NATIONALS *for Regional Australia*

For further details of the Coalition's Plan go to
www.realsolutions.org.au