



29 April 2009

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Committee Secretary
Senate Community Affairs Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Supplementary Submission to the Inquiry into the Family Assistance and Other Legislation Amendment (2008 Budget and Other Measures) Bill 2009

Dear Committee Secretary,

The National Welfare Rights Network (NWRN) appreciates this opportunity to provide additional information for the Committee's consideration further to our previous written submission and appearance at the public hearings into the Bill.

During the course of the public hearings the Committee raised the issue with witnesses in relation to any evidence that Indigenous people in remote Indigenous communities were not receiving appropriate or any income support payments. This issue has been a concern to the NWRN for a number of years and work conducted by member centres in remote and rural locations have uncovered significant numbers of Indigenous people either not receiving income support payments or being on an incorrect payment type. This has been consistent with the experience of the recent Welfare Rights Outreach Project in the Northern Territory.

Both the Department of Families, Housing, Communities and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and Centrelink have reported to the NWRN their surprise at the numbers of Indigenous people not receiving their proper entitlements which have been uncovered as a result of the Northern Territory Intervention.

The NWRN is a network of services throughout Australia that provide free and independent information, advice and representation to individuals about Social Security law and its administration through Centrelink. For member details, services and information visit: www.welfarerights.org.au

Though it is positive that many Indigenous people are now on Centrelink payments, or on the right payments, NWRN is strongly of the view that it should not have taken the intervention to spur the Government to investigate what many people anecdotally have known for some time. It should also be considered a priority for FaHCSIA and Centrelink to develop strategies in areas where there are Indigenous populations to ensure that firstly, people are receiving a payment if they are eligible and secondly, that the payment that they are receiving is appropriate to their circumstances. It remains unknown to the NWRN what work is being undertaken by both FaHCSIA and Centrelink to ensure that Indigenous people in remote communities which are not part of the NT Intervention are receiving appropriate income support.

There are a range of issues which impede appropriate access of Indigenous people to income support payments and these include lack of English, poor

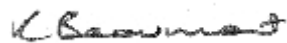
literacy skills, alienation from bureaucracy, feelings of powerlessness, perceived cultural insensitivity by officials, difficulties meeting administrative requirements such as proof of identity and high levels of mobility. These factors all contribute to some individuals "giving up" on Centrelink and instead relying on families and others in the community to get by.

CDEP has long been a viable employment alternative from the need for Indigenous people having to claim income support payments from Centrelink. It is of concern that with the CDEP changes from 1 July 2009 and the complete abolition of CDEP from 1 July 2011 that there may be additional Indigenous people who will not receive payments that they are entitled to.

NWRN has grave concerns that the timing of the CDEP changes coincides with the implementation of the new employment services and compliance model and that this will further compound the experience of disadvantage in Indigenous communities and will not contribute to the Government's efforts toward social inclusion and closing the gap.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on (08) 9328 1751 if the NWRN can be of any further assistance to the important deliberations of the committee.

Yours sincerely



Kate Beaumont
President, National Welfare Rights Network Inc.