



**Government
of South Australia**

Minister for Families
and Communities

Minister for
Aboriginal Affairs
and Reconciliation

Minister for Housing

Minister for Ageing

Minister for Disability

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Senator Trish Crossin
Australian Senate
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator *Trish*

I write to advise of actions taken by the SA Government in relation to the stolen/withheld wages of Aboriginal workers. The Premier has asked me to respond on his behalf as this matter falls under my portfolio responsibilities.

In April 2004, ATSIC wrote to me asking for an investigation into stolen/withheld wages. The former minister for Aboriginal Affairs Hon Terry Roberts, instigated an inquiry and asked the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) to undertake that investigation. In September 2004 ATSIC were informed the requested investigation was underway and that if any such funds were identified the Minister would consult with Aboriginal people on the most appropriate method of dealing with any funds owing.

I am advised that an intensive DTF investigation, which reported to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in August 2005, revealed money amounts totalling less than \$65k were shown as being owed to approximately 120 named persons. These amounts are made up of stale or voided cheques and unclaimed superannuation. Employment records compiled in the mid 1900's did not always record employees as being Aboriginal persons.

I am told that in all cases attempts were made at the time of issuing the cheques to pay the monies to the employees concerned but the cheques remain unclaimed and un-cashed so this money can not be described as stolen or withheld.

State Records is engaged in a project of indexing personal details contained in GRG 52 and other government series relevant to Aboriginal people. This process requires the searching of each document in every file and every entry in a volume. Two Aboriginal staff are dedicated to this work on a part-time basis. Some 25% of the records in the GRG 52 record group have been addressed so far. This work will continue until the entire record is indexed. We can not say with absolute certainty that no evidence of stolen/withheld wages exists but a thorough examination of the files indexed so far does not reveal any evidence of this practice occurring on an organised basis.

Private organisations and religious institutions which ran mission stations and care facilities and contractors employing Aboriginal labour may hold files detailing the employment histories of Aboriginal people. The state government does not have access to these records.

I am advised that through these previous actions and investigations the state of SA had already complied with the spirit of the recommendations described in the senate inquiry report of December 2006.

The state government will undertake consultation with the Aboriginal community leadership on the fairest and most equitable way to proceed with dispersal of the unclaimed monies.

Yours sincerely



Hon Jay Weatherill MP

MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND RECONCILIATION

15 / 12 / 2007