

Thankyou for the opportunity to have input into the Inquiry into the “Stolen Wages” debate which was “dead in the water” as far as the Queensland Government was concerned having made their “lousy little offer” in 2002 of \$4000 and \$2000.

The then Queensland Aboriginal and Legal Services Secretariat (QAILSS) undertook extensive research into this issue and produced a report and proposal to the Queensland Government which was delivered to the Premier and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs by the then Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wages and Savings Negotiation Team whose spokesperson was Sugar Ray Robinson. The proposal sought substantial reparation payments based on the length of people’s employment. A “once and only final offer” was made by Premier Beattie on 9 May 2002 with funds coming out of this offer to conduct an extensive consultation process.

QAILSS undertook an extensive consultation process which many people who participated stated that they felt intimidated, rushed and pressured into accepting the offer. The mandate of the consultation team was:

- To consult with as many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in as many communities across Queensland within the short space of time available between June 13 and August 9, 2002;
- The primary responsibility of each of the consultation teams was to consult and to provide information on as neutral and as objective basis as was possible in the circumstances;
- QAILSS also requested each of the consultation teams to consult on the concerns and desires for the eventual distribution or eventual use of the frozen Aboriginal Welfare trust monies amounting to \$8.6M;
- QAILSS provided each team with clear protocols to not knowingly or deliberately sway or influence by threats or demands any persons or communities about their decisions on the offer or the AWF;
- QAILSS noted the problems likely to be encountered by each of the consultation teams in having to distinguish between the Reparations Offer, the Under-award wages anti-discrimination payments and the AWF;

The result of the consultation was that 96% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were in favour of accepting the offer. This support however is based upon the fact that the amount to be made available to these peoples is to be at least \$55.4 in actual terms.

When the government “talked up” the response for the offer they inadvertently left off the second part in its media releases and public reports.

As at 23 January 2006, 4,831 claimants had been paid \$17.276M from the allocated \$55.4M leaving a substantial amount as unspent funds.

A media statement posted on 24 January 2006 (www.cabinet.qld.gov.au) relating to the "Stolen Wages Fund" states that "*the Stolen Wages Fund will be drawing to a close, and the unspent money will be used to benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders*" and "*the way in which this will be done, will be decided by Cabinet*".

There is no regard for the comments made by Indigenous people in 2002 that :

- The whole \$55.4M is made available to the people who are eligible;
- The individual payments of \$4000 and \$2000 were inadequate; and
- That other options for distributing the total amount are open to consideration.

Up until 1967 my parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts were all denied access to their wages, denied access to their bank accounts, denied access to departmental records about their financial affairs during the period of their employment. They were all made to feel inferior, inadequate, inconsequential and immoral for a large part of their lives. They were not able to make decisions about where they lived, worked or how their children should be educated because we all lived on an Aboriginal Reserve.

In 2006, the government is again telling us what they are going to do with the money they offered us as compensation for taking our family's capacity to create a healthy and wealthy lifestyle.

There is documented proof that the Queensland Government profited handsomely from Indigenous people's labour in cattle industry in the 30s, 40s, and 50s. It is also documented that Aboriginal people help to build and grow the great state of Queensland through the Government's unfettered access to Indigenous workers funds.

Indigenous people who lived on church run missions are still fighting their case because the government has flatly refused to pay them any compensation even though they were treated in the same way as other workers whose paid labour was controlled.

The Queensland government created a vast holding of records that is now being accessed to determine people's eligibility to payments, and to provide information on people's family history. These records provide sufficient evidence that Indigenous Queenslanders were controlled and administered by a huge government machine that was impersonal, impractical and inappropriate and created untold problems for many generations of Aboriginal people.

The consultation process that was undertaken following the "offer" in 2002 has been criticised as being rushed and in some cases pressured as people were given no real time to make a considered and informed decision. No information was sent out to people beforehand, there were no meetings to discuss the information, and no capacity for people to respond to the offer in a considered way. The way in which the consultation was approached was on the basis that this was the first and final offer – take it or leave it!

Aboriginal people want to 'set the record straight' and be given an opportunity to publicly describe the consequences of 6 generations of mandatory controls!

Aboriginal people want the Queensland Government to follow through on their \$55M offer and make a second payment to the people whose wages they controlled and misused with interest.

Aboriginal people want the Queensland Government to also compensate the people who through no fault of their own ended up on “church run missions”.

The Queensland Government happily removed, controlled, supervised and denied Indigenous people their basic human rights for almost 100 years, and got paid for it – it’s time to give it back!

Maira Bligh