

Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT 2600

Submission to Inquiry into Stolen Wages of Indigenous Workers

The government's treatment of Indigenous workers such as my family members listed below is both abhorrent and heart-breaking! Either compensation or reparation should be paid or repaid to these people or their next of kin for the following reasons:

- The families and next of kin of deceased Indigenous workers like my father Paul Meredith (now deceased) and my maternal grandparents Cecil and Dora Wilson (nee Watson) and my paternal grandparents Percy and Ettie Meredith (nee Sunflower) should be entitled to claim for wages owing to them, which were never paid, and which contributed to their living in poverty.
- Many claimants are elderly and infirm and the delay in resolving this issue means less eligible claimants that have to be repaid by the government.
- Lax governmental record keeping practices meant that claimants like my mother Barbara Meredith (nee Wilson) will never be able to prove their eligibility and rightfully claim their entitlements.
- Whilst confined to missions and reserves, Indigenous people had their human rights abused and all Indigenous residents of missions and reserves who were recorded as being sent to work, whether on the mission or off the mission, should be repaid, and if they are deceased, their next of kin should receive any wages owing. Why should the government be allowed to keep money that rightfully belongs to Indigenous people?
- My grandfather Cecil Wilson was one of those Indigenous people who gained exemption and should be entitled to claim for wages withheld *before* exemption was granted, and if deceased, their next of kin should be entitled to claim on their behalf.
- The wages of my grandfather's brother (my grand-uncle) James Meredith continued to be withheld for years after he was taken from Cherbourg mission and adopted to a white family. He never married and worked until he was quite old, meaning the government collected a life-times wages belonging to this gentleman – he was practically a slave for them! His wages should rightfully be returned and re-paid to his estate.
- It is an insult that the 'unspent money' will be spent in a way 'to benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders' in a way determined by the Queensland government. The whole of the money made available for reparation should be repaid!

I urge the government to immediately resolve the issue of paying reparation to Indigenous workers - not only is it urgent, but it is the right and honourable thing to do.

Yours sincerely,

Pamela Meredith
27/7/06