

WHAT WAS SAID BY THE PEOPLE WHO 'ACCEPTED' THE GOVERNMENT'S OFFER

From QAILSS Consultation Teams' Report
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wages and Savings Negotiation Team
(extract)

5. COMMENTS AND CONCERNS OF CLAIMANTS AND COMMUNITIES CONSULTED

- 5.1 Most of the individuals and communities consulted expressed concerns at the level of the Government's offer (\$4,000 and \$2,000) with the concerns ranging from dismay through to outright anger.
- 5.2 A number of individuals and communities referred to the Reparations Offer as a “pittance” or a “lousy pittance” while some individuals and communities sought an explanation from the Government as to why the FAIRA settlement (*for under award wages*) was fixed at \$7,000 per person in comparison to the \$4,000 and \$2,000 – far less compensation for a far greater period of wages withheld.

SPECIFIC

Included below is a selection of representative comments made by people in attendance at meetings who are eligible to claim. Many people spoke about their own stories, and similar feelings concerning the nature and the structure of the offer were voiced in every location.

“I think it very rude of government to offer that \$4,000. I lost my teenage years and worked like a dog, and I got whipped and everything all over. I worked so hard, it was no holiday. This is a rip off, you go back and tell them what I said. Many of these people have died now. \$4,000 is not good enough. Our women were raped by white men and we were all ripped off.” Yarrabah

“\$2,000?! Some politicians get more than that in a week! This is my entire life!” Yarrabah

“This is criminal, discriminating. This offer is blackmail, they don't care, it's not enough. It is bloody sickening, discriminating. We're sitting on our land and it is controlled by government, they think it is their's.” Wujal Wujal

“Is this offer going to happen? We are tired of waiting. Our old people have gone on already. Are we going to have to wait for another group to come here and tell us more? We are tired of messages. How long is it going to take to get this money? I don't want government to keep giving us another little lolly, every time we get a lolly we get grief. Is this the only money we are going to get?” Umagico

“It is hard to know that you worked so hard for all those years for nothing, and this is nothing. I will take it, but it is nothing.” Seisia

“Does government know how we worked? That we worked really hard and got nothing? We used to go out mustering for months and I was only a kid, and the government should really know this. That's what I want to tell them.” Pormpuraaw

“Government took all our money! All of it! It is hard for us, all our parents working and now nothing

for them or their children or grandchildren.” Pormpuraaw

“They're calling this reconciliation?! This is nothing. I think it is a capital crime to take Aboriginal money and put it into government coffers...everyone worked so hard and our mothers, they never got child endowment though they were entitled to it. It all went to the missions and settlements...”

Mornington Island

“\$4,000, it's too small. If the Department can pay \$7,000 for under award wages they can offer us more than \$4,000 for all the wages we earned and never saw. I think the government should be fair with us, we have been struggling all the time and look at our old people ... we are human beings! We know how hard we worked, if you ran away you could be sent back. This is taking our rights away.”

Kowanyama

“I think about this, deep in my heart, that pain. Every time we step forward we go back down, since we were young fellas. I think about what happened to us from the beginning.” Kowanyama

“It's all very well for the government to say what they are going to pay, they don't realise what we did and all for nothing.” Doomadgee

“The government has to be answerable for this! Shame! They are forcing us to accept this, they have not come clean, they are guilty. We are very angry. I'm an old woman, I can see what is going on! This is wicked in God's sight.” Doomadgee

“They used our people for free labour and they know it, we built this community, we worked hard and no way are we going to settle on this, the pain will be in our heads until the day we die!” Doomadgee

“That's not reconciliation! We deserve this! We are owed this! It is our right! They should look at this, they are robbing us again, we never had justice, we never got anything. It is written here 'without prejudice'. I don't believe that! The government never asked us, we just had to go and work. There is no option here, no choice. How long until they are answerable to us? We were not allowed to even see what was written in our own passbooks.” Doomadgee

“I will never heal from this.” Doomadgee

“You can't say sorry with money, we cannot be bought.” Doomadgee

“The people who perpetrated these acts should be accountable. If we sign the government indemnity section, will they be held accountable? And the Police sergeants who took our money, they are responsible too.” Cairns

“It seems to me that we've got no option.” Bamaga

“This is closure? You can't go anywhere with this, and we are forced to take it.” Bamaga