

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

An alliance of the CLC, NLC, CAALAS, NAAJA and AMSANT

APO NT Community Development Programme Forum

12-13 December 2016, Darwin

Communique

Forum calls for fundamental reform of CDP

The Aboriginal Peak Organisation NT (APO NT) convened a Forum in Darwin on 12-13 December 2016 to discuss deep concerns with the effect that the Australian Government's Community Development Program (CDP) is having on its participants, their families and communities.

Attended by more than 20 organisations, predominantly Aboriginal organisations and CDP providers, the Forum explored the depth of the problems with the current program, concluding that the CDP is doing substantial harm to individuals and communities without generating sufficient opportunity. Combining both CDP provider expertise and strong Aboriginal community relationships and perspectives, the Forum identified the following fundamental flaws with the program:

- The lack of Aboriginal community control or input into the program design, or delivery;
- The lack of employment outcomes, and inability to provide career pathways and long-term 'on the job' support;
- The program does not do enough to encourage enterprise development or stimulate job creation;
- The lack of flexibility in CDP implementation resulting in a complete inability to tailor arrangements to maximize positive outcomes in different regions and communities;
- The program is punitive and fundamentally fails to understand what drives change in remote Aboriginal communities;
- The program is focused on individuals at the expense of community development and engagement;

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- The program is focused on short-term outcomes with no measurement of net gain to communities;
 - Under CDP, most participants are required to do many more Work for the Dole hours than others in order to receive income support – meaning that participants are being set up to fail;
 - The penalty regime is disproportionately impacting on remote Aboriginal people leading to food insecurity, greater poverty, and increased disengagement from the system entirely; and,
 - Thousands of CDP participants are locked into work at a rate well below award rates, with no work entitlements or protections and with little or no prospect of earning additional income or leaving income support.

In addition, some critical program delivery and implementations challenges were identified including:

- Expensive and complex administrative and IT systems resulting in more time spent on compliance and reporting than on delivering outcomes, and preventing the employment of local people;
- Appropriate assessment processes are simply not available in remote locations; and,
- Department of Human Services systems, particularly participant access to Centrelink, are inadequate;

Based on the substantial evidence that CDP is failing, and drawing on extensive experience delivering successful programs in remote Aboriginal communities, Forum participants agreed to work together to develop an alternative model that could form the basis of negotiations with the Australian Government.

The alternative model will be underpinned by the following principles:

- the program must be driven by community level decision making, not centrally imposed rules;
- it should include greater access to waged employment and emphasise incentives over punishment;
- it should foster long term economic, social and cultural development and be measured on its success in supporting these over an extended period;
- it should include a much greater emphasis on job creation;

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- it must include much greater support for job retention and career advancement; and,
 - it should be much less bureaucratic, so that program resources go into individual and community impact, not into red tape.

While maintaining a focus on the need for comprehensive reform, the Forum also identified short-term improvements which could be implemented without legislative reform. Forum participants are calling on the Australian Government to immediately:

- Reduce the current Work for the Dole requirements applied to CDP participants to a level more closely aligned to requirements elsewhere;
- Provide local flexibility in the arrangement of days and hours of participation and associated supervision and administrative arrangements;
- Revise CDP contractual arrangements to allow providers to determine when to recommend breaches based on community and individual circumstances without penalty; and,
- Make adjustments within existing social security laws to improve the fairness of the system.

Achieving both immediate and long-term reform of CDP is a priority issue for many CDP providers, Aboriginal organisations and other supporters. APO NT has committed to building a strong alliance of organisations to progress this work in 2017, and has asked the Australian Government to commit to an inclusive collaborative process to redesign the CDP with a view to improving better outcomes for Aboriginal people living in remote areas.

For further information, please contact:

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