

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

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

MEDIA ALERT

Aboriginal organisations call to replace discriminatory Work for the Dole scheme

Date: Friday 8 September 2017

Time: 12:45 – 1:30pm (AEST)

Location: Mural Hall, Parliament House

Who: John Paterson, CEO, Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT (APO NT)
David Ross, Director, Central Land Council (APO NT)
Rod Little, Co-Chair, National Congress
David Thompson, CEO, Jobs Australia
Ged Kearney, President, Australian Council of Trade Unions
Maria Harvey, CEO, Tiwi Islands Training & Employment Board
Dickie Bedford, CEO, Marra Worra Worra

MEDIA RELEASE

The Australian Government should replace its racially discriminatory remote 'work for the dole' program with an Aboriginal-led model for fair work and strong communities.

In a [report](#) to be launched in Canberra, the Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APO NT) will call for the Government to afford people in remote communities with respect, opportunity and the same workplace rights that other Australians take for granted.

John Paterson from APO NT, said, "For too long the Australian Government has not listened. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities want to take up the reins and drive job creation and community development initiatives. It's time for the Government to work with us."

"The current Community Development Program keeps people in the welfare system and excessive penalties are devastating remote communities. Remote communities need a program that sees people employed on decent pay and conditions, to work on projects the community needs," said Mr Paterson.

The report calls for a new model – the Remote Development and Employment Scheme. The Scheme would create 10,500 part time jobs to be filled by people who are currently receiving below minimum wage social security payments to do work they should be employed to do.

David Ross from APO NT, said, “The new model will see new opportunities for jobs, enterprise and community development and get rid of pointless administration. Critically, the Scheme provides incentives to encourage people into work, training and other activities, rather than punishing people already struggling to comply.”

The Remote Development and Employment Scheme would support young people with paid traineeships. Remote Job Centres would guide people into meaningful jobs, and work with communities to build opportunities for enterprise and long term jobs. People who still require the support of the social security system would have obligations no more onerous than those that apply to people in non-remote areas.

APO NT’s new model has been supported by over 30 organisations, including remote community Aboriginal-controlled service providers.

Further quotes about the report:

Dickie Bedford, CEO, Marra Worra Worra:

“Under the CDP communities have lost control, and people feel that it is just the Government telling them what to do. The APO NT model would allow us to employ our own people, with rules that are set to meet our conditions and the aspirations of our communities.”

Maria Harvey, CEO, Tiwi Islands Training and Education Board:

“Under CDP, instead of working to get people skilled up to get better jobs, we spend our time on administration so that people can be penalised by Centrelink. A lot of work for the dole projects in remote constitute duties that other people are paid wages for in any other part of the country. The APO NT Model will give a platform for this real job creation to occur. Under the APO NT model our focus would go back to working with the community and individuals to get more people into employment.”

Rod Little, Co-Chair of the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples:

“Congress is encouraged that this model has been developed by people and organisations working on the ground with job seekers.

It aims to ensure success with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people clearly directing the program based on evidence and learning, and focused on achieving long-term results.

We urge the Government to support this program to enhance skills and community capacity building, and eliminate harm caused by unemployment and poverty.”

Ged Kearney, President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions:

“The CDP is a racially discriminatory program which is having a devastating impact on jobs in remote communities. Workers in remote communities need jobs which are paid a wage, not unpaid positions in a punitive program which overwhelmingly applies to Indigenous Australians.

The ACTU, through the FNWA, stands with workers in remote communities for the duration of this campaign. We want to see this program scrapped, we want to change the rules for workers in remote communities. We cannot tolerate one rule for people in the cities and another for First Nations workers.”

David Thompson AM, CEO of Jobs Australia

“The Community Development Programme is causing unnecessary financial hardship, exacerbating poverty and doing more harm than good in remote Australia. It has not made significant inroads in providing long-term solutions to joblessness. Indigenous people in CDP are much more likely to get a financial penalty than get a job.”

Adrienne Walters, Director of Legal Advocacy at the Human Rights Law Centre:

“The Government’s Community Development Program requires people in remote communities to work up to 500 or 760 hours more over a year than people in non-remote areas without any extra payment. It is a program applied overwhelmingly against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This is a racially discriminatory government program that is displacing waged work and must be abandoned.”

Cassandra Goldie, CEO of the Australian Council of Social Service:

“The Government must work with Aboriginal people and repair the safety net for remote communities. We have heard story after story of people being penalised, unable to access Centrelink, and ending up without any income support. It is the Government who is failing in its duty to ensure that basic social protections are available to those who need them.”

The launch coincides with [Senate hearings about the Government’s current Community Development Program](#), work for the dole program.

A summary of APO NT’s Report can be found [here](#).

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KEY FACTS ABOUT THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

The CDP is the main program of job related assistance for unemployed people in remote areas of Australia (map attached). It is the equivalent of jobactive (formerly JSA) and Disability Employment Services in the rest of the country.

The CDP has around 35,000 participants, around 83% of whom are identified as Indigenous.

People with full time work capacity who are 18-49 years old must Work for the Dole, 25 hours per week, 5 days per week, at least 46 weeks per year (1150 hours per year). Under jobactive Work for the Dole only starts after 12 months, and then for 390-650 hours per year.

Despite having a caseload less than a 20th the size of jobactive, more penalties are applied to CDP participants than to jobactive participants.

In the 21 months from the start of CDP on 1 July 2015 to the end of March 2017, **299,055** financial penalties were applied to CDP participants. Over the same period, **237,333** financial penalties were applied to jobactive participants.

END MEDIA RELEASE