

# Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

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

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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### Failure guaranteed if you don't involve us, say Aboriginal organisations

**19 October 2017**

The Australian Government must step out from behind closed doors and involve Indigenous people in a transparent process for reforming the discriminatory remote 'work for the dole' scheme, the Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APO NT)<sup>1</sup> urged today.

The Government committed to reviewing the program, called the 'Community Development Program' (CDP) and consulting with remote communities in May 2017.

John Paterson, from APO NT said "We have been calling on the Minister for Indigenous Affairs to clarify and formalise the Community Development Program reform process since last December. Every request is met with silence," said Mr Paterson.

"The Prime Minister and Minister for Indigenous Affairs never tire of talking about how they want to do things with us, not to us. That they want new ways of working with Aboriginal people. Yet here is a program that affects the lives of 29,000 Indigenous people and has caused immense harm, and we still can't get confirmation of a process that includes us," said Mr Paterson.

Australia's election to the world's leading human rights body, the UN Human Rights Council, this week relied on a pledge to support the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 'in both word and deed'. The Declaration requires the Government to work in partnership with Aboriginal people and respect the right to self-determination.

"The Australian Government said to the world that it would tackle Indigenous disadvantage in partnership with our people. Meanwhile the Government's racially discriminatory program results in Aboriginal people receiving more penalties than other Australians, and hurts our communities," said Mr Paterson.

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<sup>1</sup> APO NT is an alliance of five peak Aboriginal bodies, the Northern Land Council (NLC), Central Land Council (CLC), North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA), Central Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (CAALAS) and the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT (AMSANT).

“If the Government is serious about the promises it made to get elected to the Council, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs will immediately announce an independent and transparent reform process involving a partnership with Aboriginal people,” added Mr Paterson.

APO NT launched a positive alternative to CDP in Canberra last month ([APO NT alternative to CDP](#)). Our model would create 10,500 part time jobs to be filled by people in remote communities who currently get less than the minimum wage to do work they should be employed and paid properly to do. Our model would create new jobs and enterprises, strengthen communities and get rid of pointless administration. It has incentives to encourage people into work, training and other activities, rather than punishing people who are already struggling.

David Ross from APO NT, said, “Thirty-three organisations from around Australia have endorsed our new model. We have done the work, we want to talk, and we want a program that will actually deliver positive outcomes on the ground.”

“The Australian Government appears to be unable to put the rhetoric of collaboration into practice. What do all these commitments mean if they don't deliver a seat at the table on this fundamental issue? Let's not repeat the mistakes of the past and impose a top-down program from Canberra that is guaranteed to fail in remote Australia,” Mr Ross concluded.

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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. 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.