

Survey results call for further negotiation and access to inheritances

Final results for a Stolen Wages Survey distributed throughout the state strongly indicate a high level of dissatisfaction with the Queensland Government's handling of its Indigenous Wages and Savings Reparations offer.

The survey, devised by the Stolen Wages Campaign Working Group after Treasurer Terry Mackenroth refused to allocate funds for re-negotiating on the issue, was distributed in response to the Queensland Government's refusal to carry out its own Labor Party policy.

98.9FM General Manager Tiga Bayles said the survey results [see below] also indicated a poor information flow, not only in the Indigenous community but also within the wider community [only 75% of both Indigenous and non-indigenous respondents were aware of the Queensland Government offer].

"This confirms peoples' feelings that people in Indigenous communities haven't been serviced well enough by the Government and they've failed us again," he said.

Queensland Council of Unions Assistant Secretary Chris Barrett said the survey results showed concerns raised about the offer three years ago by the QCU executive and other groups still hadn't been addressed.

"And that's disappointing because they deserve a better outcome than that," he said.

"The Government still needs to go back to the community and re-negotiate closure on this issue for the thousands of people - workers and their families - who were affected by this loss of wages and savings and are still affected today."

ANTaR Qld Secretary Bruce Lillis said the survey demonstrated the emptiness of the Government's assertion that the offer had been "well-accepted".

"The Government also claims the Indigenous community accepts a lack of records as a reasonable excuse for continuing to withhold their wages," he said.

"But our results showed that 75% of Indigenous respondents do not accept that."

Brisbane elder Aunty Ruth Hegarty said the results showed the Government should "lift their game".

"We talk about reconciliation yet what we're seeing here with this offer is no reconciliation," she said.

"This offer hasn't been thought out properly and it's not working".

Townsville elder Lillian Willis said the Government should extend the offer and be far more aware that stolen wages was a sensitive issue for the community.

"The message is getting out there, mostly through the work of the campaign, but this offer needs to be extended so everyone knows about it and so people have got more time to consider their options," she said.

Also from Townsville, elder Yvonne Butler said the survey results discredited the Government's stance on the stolen wages issue.

"The survey is saying exactly what the campaign has been saying for the past three years and the percentages speak for themselves," she said.

Mrs Butler said it was heartening to see strong non-indigenous interest in the issue and it was time the Government took some notice of how people felt about it.

Yarrabah Mayor Vince Mundraby said the results showed the community was watching how the Government was handling this issue.

"If the Government is going to talk about accountability within Aboriginal communities they should show the same for addressing these outstanding issues," he said.

Former-Yarrabah worker Tennyson Kynuna said the survey results, particularly around the need for an independent audit of what was owed, supported what he already knew about how he, his family and community felt.

"We never had a chance for financial security, we never saw our accounts in those days and now we're only just finding out how much money was taken from us," he said.

"One person I know worked on stations for five or ten years or more but at the time he couldn't even buy a guitar because of the restrictions on his own money and he never got that back.

"That happened to a lot of people I know and I don't think \$2000 or \$4000 makes up for that."

Stolen Wages Survey Results

In 2002 Queensland Government made a capped reparations offer of \$55.6 million to Aboriginal & Islander people whose wages and savings were held for them in trust by previous governments.

The offer amounts to fixed payments of \$2000 or \$4000 to individual claimants alive after 9 May 2002, which was the day the offer was first made.

Families of deceased workers cannot apply.

Some elderly claimants were forced to work for more than 20 years with limited access to their wages and savings, most of which have not been repaid.

The offer requires claimants to sign an indemnity to say they will not take any legal action to recover what might be owed.

Even if they have records to prove it, they cannot claim all their money without taking the Government to court.

The Stolen Wages Survey was developed by the Stolen Wages Campaign Working Group in response to the Queensland Government's failure to comply with what is now State Labor policy.

The current Queensland Government Wages & Savings reparations offer will close at the end of 2005 and the Stolen Wages Campaign Working Group has resolved to try to provide their own evidence that a further consultation and negotiation with the community is necessary - and should be adequately resourced as per the 2004 State Labor Platform document.

The Stolen Wages Survey was run over 10 weeks from April to June in 2005.

More than 5,000 were printed and 608 replies from Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents were returned (a rate of more than 10%).

Indigenous Responses

There were 131 Indigenous responses, representing 22% of the total. Of those, only 3 out of 4 (75%) respondents indicated they knew about the Government's offer.

Do Indigenous respondents think it's fair? 94% do not, while a further 3% chose not to comment.

96% believed payouts should be calculated on the basis of what is owed.

A full 100% believe that families of deceased workers deserve to claim their forebears' wages.

75% of Indigenous claimants felt that inadequate record-keeping should not affect a person's eligibility for claiming the current offer.

96% believed an independent inquiry was necessary and 97% believe there should be a chance for former-workers to publicise their stories.

Non-Indigenous Responses

There were 477 non-Indigenous responses, 76% of all replies.

73% knew of the offer, but only 3.5% of those who knew about stolen wages as an issue found out about it from the Government. The rest found out about it through the media, the stolen wages campaign or via other means.

Is the offer fair? 99% say no.

99% said payments should be based on what is owed.

99% said families should receive what should have been paid to their forebears.

76% of non-Indigenous respondents agreed that eligibility should not depend on the Government's record keeping.

Support for an independent inquiry to audit of what is owed was 98% and 99% believed claimants should have the opportunity to tell their Stolen Wages stories publicly.



Stolen Wages Stickers (left) out now!

Please note the Stolen Wages Campaign Working Group does not encourage the use of these stickers on public buildings such as hospitals, court houses and police stations, government cars or other public infrastructure which may have been built or funded by stolen wages.

A FULL STOLEN WAGES UPDATE NEWSLETTER WILL BE AVAILABLE FROM THE ANTAR QLD WEBSITE BY MID-JULY

WHO TO CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Keep up to date with developments and find out what you can do from the following people and organisations:

The Queensland Council of Unions: (07) 3846 2468: <http://www.qcu.asn.au>

ANTaR Qld: (07) 3844 9800 <http://www.antar.qld.org.au> Contact: antarqld@dovenetq.net.au

Australia Asia Worker Links: <http://www.aawl.org.au> Contact: aawl@aawl.org.au

For email information and contacts for the Stolen Wages Working Group and its executive, contact

Christine Howes on 0419 656 277 or to join the Stolen Wages Update list email chowes@hotmail.net.au

Background Information: Dr Ros Kidd: <http://www.linksdisk.com/roskidd>