



OUR VOICE OUR FUTURE

Priorities for Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander Workers

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better life.



For hundreds of years, since the invasion of Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have had their lives controlled by failed government policy.

This series of failed policies have left many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in conditions of despair and entrenched poverty that is unforgivable in a first world country.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel abandoned by their governments as decisions are made which prioritise the interests of big business and the paternalistic ideas of a few over the interests of their families and communities.

The ACTU rejects the neoliberal agenda which seeks to punish the vulnerable; paternalistically control and assimilate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and facilitate the wishes of big business over self-determination.

The ACTU rejects the neoliberal model of capitalism which is attacking land rights, driving increased levels of inequality, creating an underclass of workers and undermining the basis of democracy and the idea of a fair and equal society.



Jo Kerr

*ACTU Executive Representative (Indigenous)
Chair, ACTU Indigenous Committee*





OUR VOICE OUR FUTURE

A decent living standard, just wages, social protections, the social safety net and self-determined, fulfilling employment is at the heart of the Australian Union Movement.

We will not sit idly by and watch while human rights and workers' rights are undermined.

The Australian union movement will work to identify, increase and empower its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander membership for a strong representative voice to ensure these rights.

Our vision is one where:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities are, as sovereign and self-determining peoples, the arbiters of their place in Australia and are equal partners with government in the development and implementation of policies that affect their way of life and livelihoods;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers are engaged in fulfilling employment with the standard conditions and wages afforded to other Australian workers;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are respected; the diversity of cultures, lands and traditions are respected, Treaties have been negotiated and seen as an integral part of the Australian identity; and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have economic security, a decent social safety net and access to universal social services.

For any Government, the first 100 days are a critical time when election commitments can start to be implemented, narratives are cemented and the direction is set for the nation.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, these commitments, narratives and directions are consistently focused on the 'problem'.



There is an alternative to this established narrative. We can change direction. Commitments which empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities can be made and implemented. We can change the frame and start to build a better future for First Nations peoples.

#1

Community Development Program

The Community Development Program (CDP), the newest version of the CDEP, is now a system of compliance (rather than employment and innovation) which forces workers into unequal and discriminatory employment arrangements. The CDP and its work for the dole requirements have created a second tier of worker in Australia and essentially established a pool of free labour for employers.

Not only does the CDP put downward pressure on available employment and wages, the CDP disempowers local communities and workers, potentially increasing inter-generational dependency and decreasing innovation that builds sustainable economies and communities.

PRIORITY

An alternative government must announce a comprehensive overhaul of the current CDP with a focus on innovation, sustainability and fairness in employment and building economies which value and amplify the contribution Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities make to our nation.

This overhaul should be used to change the narrative from one that posits First Nation communities as a 'problem' that needs to be controlled to a narrative that posits the diversity of cultures, lands and traditions as an integral part of the Australian identity.



#2

Consultation

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as sovereign and self-determining First Nation's peoples, must be equal partners in a robust and transparent consultation process which starts at the beginning of policy development.

Too often Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are only consulted once the policy has been developed or enabling legislation has been enacted. This approach to policy development has left many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in conditions of despair and entrenched poverty that is unforgivable in a first world country.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples feel abandoned by their governments as decisions are made which prioritise the interests of big business and the paternalistic ideas of a few over the interests of their families and communities.

PRIORITY

An alternative government must immediately announce an intention to establish First Nation's representative mechanisms to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the architects of their place in Australia. These mechanisms must be designed in equal partnership, adequately resourced and supported in perpetuity.



#3

Retirement Savings

The life expectancy gap of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is 10 years lower than non-Indigenous people. However Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are currently dying at an average age of 55.4 percent for men and 61.5 percent for women. As such Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the workforce are more likely to die than retire.

In recognition of the life expectancy gap an alternative government must immediately implement a retirement savings strategy that addresses the inequality of access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers.

PRIORITY

The retirement savings strategy should include:

- a reduction in the statutory retirement age and superannuation access age for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers which reflects the life expectancy gap;
- a reduction / amendment to the statutory age for accessing the old age pension and or any other relevant government benefits;
- a review of the tax free threshold status in conjunction with a reduction in the statutory age for accessing superannuation;
- a review of legislation which governs relatives accessing the superannuation of a deceased person with a view to giving consideration to “kinship” structures and consideration to the lack of formal identification documents that is common in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families;
- a time limit that mirrors the closing of the life expectancy gap as committed to by the federal government.



#4

Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) Funding

The 2014/2015 Federal Budget and subsequent Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) had severe and detrimental effects on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and community-led organisations.

The loss of funding not only had an impact on locally provided front line services but also caused wide-spread job losses.

To compound these matters, the nature of the new grants system - the Indigenous Advancement Strategy - has caused confusion, frustration and apprehension and has ultimately seen significant cuts to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations across the country in favour of non-Indigenous service providers.

The lack of consultation with Indigenous service providers and communities raises concerns about the transparency, accountability and legitimacy of a process which has left communities less empowered to self-determine the policies and programs that directly affect them.

PRIORITY

An alternative government must restore the half a billion lost in the 2014/2015 Budget to Indigenous Affairs and pursue a funding system which ensures community controlled organisations have preference over large non-Indigenous organisations.



#5

Cost of Living and Subsidies

The cost of buying fresh fruit and vegetables in regional and remote communities can be up to 30% more than in our urban centres. Overall, groceries can cost up to 60% more in remote Indigenous communities.

The health outcomes associated with poor diet due to increased costs of fresh food means that 1 in 5 adults have type 2 diabetes and 3 in 10 have chronic kidney disease.

The next government must address price gouging and the impact this has on low income, high cost communities, their cost of living and the associated health outcomes.

PRIORITY

The next government must investigate the feasibility of:

- Working with communities organisations and Land Councils in assistance for subsidies for transportation costs;
- Working towards country wide regulations on price gouging in remote communities;



“ If you have come to help me you are wasting your time.
But if you have come because your liberation is bound up
with mine, then let us work together. ”

Lilla Watson
*Lilla Watson is a Gangulu woman,
Murri visual artist, activist and academic*

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