

INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

Coalition

The Coalition Government has embarked on a major emergency intervention to tackle issues such as law and order and child abuse within Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. Underpinning this action was the emphatic belief that children within indigenous communities are entitled to the same opportunity for happy productive lives and protection from violence as every other Australian child.

The Coalition Government has already announced \$587 million to support the first year of the intervention as well as a commitment for ongoing support.

In addition, over the coming four years, the Coalition will provide a further \$740 million funding in following essential areas

- \$514 million to repair and build housing in remote NT communities.
- \$100 million for more doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and specialist services.
- \$18.5 million for 66 additional Australian Federal Police involved in resolving law and order issues within NT indigenous communities.
- \$78.2 million to move indigenous Australians from CDEP to real jobs in fields such as the arts, broadcasting, community care, education, sport and recreation, night patrols, environmental and pastoral management, childcare and municipal services.

Up to \$30 million to match the NT Government on a dollar for dollar basis to create further employment opportunities.

The Coalition Government has also announced changes to the Permit system within the NT resulting in permits not being required for public town areas, infrastructure and roads but still maintaining permits for sacred sites and private residences. These changes affect only 1% of Aboriginal land. These reforms will help connect those townships with the real economy and the prospect of a better future as well as providing for more public scrutiny and openness - like other Australian towns. It is notable that a number of relatively functional communities, like Daly River which has strong Christian connections, do not have the permit system and that is the way they prefer it to be.

Importantly, the Coalition wants to work with traditional owners to enable them to realise economic benefit from their land, previously frustrated by restrictive provisions in legislation but without affecting their underlying freehold tenure over land.

As well as the NT emergency intervention, the Coalition has provided \$130 million following its 2006 Summit on violence and abuse in Indigenous communities for policing, rehabilitation and other measures to support the states and territories in this work.

Overall, the Coalition Government has provided a record \$3.5 billion in 2007-08 for indigenous programs nationally over and above specific funding for the NT intervention. Finally, the Coalition is committed to implementing welfare reform, starting in NT aboriginal communities because of the concentration of dysfunction, to ensure that welfare paid for the benefit of children is actually used for children and not wasted through the scourges of substance abuse and gambling.

Socialist Alliance

We recognise the sovereignty of Indigenous nations and call for a negotiated treaty to set this in law. We would make a formal apology and full reparation to the stolen generation, pay full compensation for stolen wages and property, and insist on implementing all of the recommendations of the 1991 Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody. We would launch an emergency, properly funded campaign to eliminate Indigenous disadvantage and inequality in health, education, housing and jobs to be developed and overseen by the relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations.

Socialist Equality

The SEP condemns the government's police-military intervention into the Northern Territory – carried out through the suspension of the 1975 Racial Discrimination Act – as a monstrous assault on the democratic rights of the Aboriginal people. We demand the immediate withdrawal of all military forces from the NT. Aboriginal people must have the democratic right to decide their own future, free from state harassment and coercion.

The SEP seeks to unite Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal alike in the struggle against the profit system which has been responsible for the heinous crimes against the Aboriginal population and in that way lift every persons living standard to not only close the health and well being gap but to ensure genuine social and political equality.

Greens

The Australian Greens strongly believe that redress is needed for past and present injustices to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and continue to call for a treaty that would enshrine recognition of prior occupation in the Australian Constitution. We believe saying 'sorry' is necessary but not sufficient, without reparations to right these wrongs.

We are committed to the call for equality of access to essential services within a decade, and equality of outcomes on all major indicators of health, education and opportunities within a generation (25 years). This will require a major investment in both community and mainstream services. In doing so, we are supporting the calls of many leading Australians to make the health of today's generation of Aboriginal children a priority and use this as a focus around which to improve the opportunities and the well-being of the whole community.

We believe there should be an urgent investment to reduce the gap in life expectancy and rates of chronic disease within a generation as part of a national Indigenous health strategy (a commitment of \$500M/yr).

Australian Democrats

The extent of Indigenous inequality and disadvantage in Australia at a time of record prosperity is a national disgrace. The Democrats are committed to playing our part in closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and between Indigenous and 'mainstream' communities. Only a significant and sustained investment by governments to improve the quality of life and the safety, education and health care

available to Indigenous people will bring the life expectancy and levels of opportunity closer to those of the non-Indigenous population.

The key points that must be given top priority if we are serious about closing the gap are:

- co-ordinated service delivery and regional autonomy
- community safety and development
- recognition and respect for cultural heritage
- education and economic development
- and unfinished business – reconciliation; 'Bringing them Home' report; formal agreement or treaty; amending the Constitution; legal system reform; deaths in custody; native title; stolen wages.

All political parties must seriously commit to giving top priority to addressing the inequality and challenges faced by Indigenous Australians, and to develop genuine longterm solutions in consultation with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people.

For further details on our policy and our plans for better health and education for Indigenous Australians see

http://www.democrats.org.au/docs/ActionPlans/Indigenous_Indigenous_2007.pdf

http://www.democrats.org.au/docs/ActionPlans/Education_Indigenous_2007.pdf

http://www.democrats.org.au/docs/ActionPlans/Heath_Indigenous_2007.pdf

Christian Democrats

It is important to develop a culture of self-respect and self-management among indigenous Australians. The passive welfare mentality to which these communities have been subjected for years has been very damaging for them.

Proper justice for indigenous Australians can only be administered once the damage created by alcohol and drugs is recognized and positive solutions are offered to these communities. Education is paramount as a first step.

Idleness contributes also significantly to the abuse engendered by drugs and alcohol. More training opportunities should therefore be extended to indigenous Australians.

Teaching a responsible lifestyle to many individuals in these communities is critical and stricter controls should be provided to prevent tax payer funds being misused in purchasing large quantities of alcohol and drugs to the detriment of food and shelter.

The distribution of pornographic material (video and magazines) should be banned as such explicit imagery only contributes to the spread of paedophilia and rape in these communities.

We must also acknowledge that a spiritual war is being waged in these communities; we must put the past behind us, forgive each other for the hostility created, and press on constructively for a positive future.

Finally, indigenous Australians need to understand they can be part of the democratic process and that they can improve their own living conditions through political lobbying as well as by running for parliamentary office.

Labor

The Labor Party did not provide a response for this forum. Policy information has been collated from the ALP website www.alp.org.au

Labor is committed to advancing reconciliation, and taking practical steps to improve the social and economic wellbeing of Indigenous Australians.

A Federal Labor Government would endorse Australia becoming a signatory to the International Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The declaration is about the international community expressing its support for Indigenous people and their children having an equal chance at life.

In addition, Federal Labor would undertake a number of practical measures to support self-reliance among Indigenous Australians. Federal Labor's practical measures include:

- Investing \$30 million to provide teachers for the at least 2,000 Aboriginal children who are not enrolled in school – at all – in the 60 “prescribed communities” in the Northern Territory. (Federal Labor's investment will fund an extra 200 teachers who are needed urgently to educate these 2,000 children.)
- An Indigenous Australia Australian Federal Police Recruitment Strategy, which is part of our \$200 million AFP Federal Policing Plan;
- A \$260 million plan to provide comprehensive child and maternal health, and early education to help close the 17-year gap in life expectancy for children being born today, which incorporates a \$10.3 million plan to eradicate rheumatic fever amongst Aboriginal children;
- Support for a trial linking family and welfare payments to school attendance and the proper care of children in four communities in Cape York;
- Universal preschool for all Indigenous four-year olds;
- A Healthy Kids Check for every Indigenous child starting school;
- An early development check (the Australian Early Development Index) for every Indigenous child starting school; and
- Providing \$15.7m over four years for extra Bringing Them Home Counsellors & link-up services.

Federal Labor's plan for more teachers is in addition to the police, doctors and nurses urgently needed in these communities.

In the fortieth year since the passing of the 1967 Referendum, a Rudd Labor Government will commit to closing the 17-year gap life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people within a generation.

Indigenous women will have access to:

- proper antenatal care (including a visit to a midwife or doctor, an ultrasound, and a general health check);
- practical advice on parenting, breastfeeding and nutrition for their babies;
- home visit services for new Indigenous mothers and children aged 0-8 years, along with the States and Territories.

Labor will invest \$10 million in tackling rheumatic fever in Indigenous kids - a condition almost unknown outside the third world. Labor will provide \$10 million for accommodation services for Indigenous women if they're travelling from remote to urban and regional centres to have their babies.