

Stolen Wages Update 9

September 2006

Working Group meeting calls for left over funds to go to workers & their families

More than 60 people from Normanton, Cairns, Cherbourg, Townsville, Palm Island, Rockhampton & Brisbane met at Jagera Arts Centre earlier this month to discuss the stolen wages campaign and confer with HREOC President John von Doussa.

Queensland Council of Unions Indigenous Support Officer Ken Willie, ANTaR National Director Gary Highland, Dr Ros Kidd and Australia Asia Worker Links' Jiselle Hanna also attended.

The Queensland Government's Indigenous Wages and Savings Reparations offer closed in January this year. The offer conditionally comprised of \$2000 or \$4000 payments made according to age to former workers who were living on or after 9 May 2002.

It was reported to the meeting that in May this year Queensland Premier Peter Beattie told Parliament the government would consult with the community about what should happen to approximately \$35 million left over from his \$55.4 million capped offer for stolen wages.

As a result of an earlier meeting in Brisbane in early June an open letter was written to the Premier offering to help the government identify the people who should be consulted on its distribution. A reply had been received later from Rob Whiddon, the Premier's Chief of Staff, stating that the letter had been forwarded to the appropriate Minister, John Mickel, for reply. To date there has been no further answer or response. The main options were to create a general trust or to

distribute remaining funds to workers and their families. By a show of hands the meeting agreed that the money left over from the ISWR funds must go back to the people who had worked for it and their families.

Concern was also expressed about:

- people who have died since applying for the fund and claims that no money had yet been paid to families,
- the Government's claim that records had been lost or destroyed as the basis for non-payment,
- people had signed for their money under duress after being told that if they didn't accept the offer they wouldn't get anything.

There was strong general agreement that the Government should be forced to take some responsibility for missing records and that oral evidence should be accepted as the basis for a claim in Queensland, as in New South Wales.

The meeting included a light lunch provided by ANTaR Qld and was held the day before Dr Ros Kidd launched her new book, 'Trustees on Trial' from the Brisbane Writers' Festival.

See inside for a summary of discussions with HREOC President John von Doussa & Dr Ros Kidd. Mr von Doussa's speech to the book launch is also available from the HREOC website at <http://www.humanrights.gov.au>

