

Tuesday, 19 August 2014

1475. Hon Robin Chapple to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

Regarding the employment of Aboriginal station workers engaged in domestic duties and/or pastoral work in Western Australia during the years 1955 to 1975, I ask:

(a) what legislation or Western Australian Government regulations or standards were in place between 1955 and 1975 to ensure adequate wages and other conditions for Ms Helen Clifton and other Aboriginal workers at Bedford Downs Station;

(b) what role did the Western Australian Governments throughout the period play to ensure the implementation and adequacy of these measures;

(c) how did the wages and conditions for Ms Helen Clifton at Bedford Downs Station between 1955 and 1975, and other Aboriginal workers at Bedford Downs Station at that time, compare to the wages and conditions of non-Aboriginal workers in Western Australia during that time;

(d) were the measures referred to in (a) and (b) effective in ensuring adequate wages and other conditions:

(i) for Ms Helen Clifton during the time she worked at Bedford Downs Station; and

(ii) for other Aboriginal workers during that time at Bedford Downs Station; and

(e) does the Government consider that the measures referred to in (d) above were effective or not effective:

(i) if effective, why does the Government consider that to be the case; and

(ii) if ineffective, why does the Government consider that to be the case?

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(a) – (e) The Stolen Wages Taskforce Report provides a comprehensive analysis of the practice of Government control over the wages, savings and entitlements and other monies of Aboriginal people that applied across Western Australia.

The Stolen Wages Taskforce indicated that the *Aborigines Act 1905* and the *Native Welfare Act 1963* outlined the legal frameworks which provided the control over Aboriginal people's lives in Western Australia and the consequential controls over Aboriginal people's property, including money.

The *Social Services Consolidation Act 1947* was the main Commonwealth Act relating to the lives of Aboriginal people in the context of income and eligibility for entitlements. Age Pensions were introduced in 1908, but Aboriginal people had no entitlement at all to most types of benefits until 1942.

After 1942, entitlements were extended to Aboriginal people who were 'exempt' from the provisions of the State legislation relating to Aboriginal people, or an Aboriginal person whom the relevant Commonwealth authority believed should receive an entitlement on the basis of the persons 'character, standard of intelligence and development'. These restrictions were removed from February 1960, although Aboriginal people who were defined as 'nomadic' or 'primitive' continued to be ineligible for Commonwealth entitlements.

It is widely recognised that Aboriginal people were treated differently as a result of discriminatory legislation and policy that existed during the period of 1905 to 1972.



Minister for Aboriginal Affairs