

Tuesday, 19 August 2014

1480. Hon Robin Chapple to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

I refer to question on notice No. 1120 regarding the Stolen Wages Reparations Western Australia claim of Ms Helen Clifton, and to the Stolen Wages Taskforce Report, Appendix 3 Kimberley "Aboriginal station workers were unlikely to experience direct control of their monies by the State but they were likely to experience private warrantee control of their monies"...and..."The State had a responsibility to ensure that Aboriginal people were protected from injustice and fraud and to exercise a general supervision over their interests and welfare. Commonwealth reports from the 1960s raise questions as to whether the department exercised adequate supervision of private warrantees' expenditure of pension money, and to whether they fulfilled their above duties of protection", and I ask:

(a) did the State uphold its responsibility and ensure that "Aboriginal people were protected from injustice and fraud" and did the State "exercise a general supervision of their interests and welfare":

(i) if no to (a), why not; and

(ii) if yes to (a), can the Minister provide instances and examples of where this was done;

(b) did the State exercise adequate supervision of private warrantees' expenditure of pension money and fulfil its other duties of protection:

(i) if no to (b), why not;

(c) since the Minister is responsible for all matters relating to Aboriginal Affairs, will the Minister explain why he will not comment on those matters affecting Aboriginal people who were former station workers, even though he considers them "outside the scope of the Stolen Wages Taskforce's inquiry":

(i) does the Minister also have a responsibility to address these people's concerns and grievances:

(A) if no to (c)(i), why not; and

(B) if yes to (c)(i), will the Minister reconsider his answers to questions regarding the Stolen Wages Taskforce where he has replied "outside the scope of the Stolen Wages Taskforce's inquiry"; and

(d) since the Stolen Wages Taskforce's brief did not include an investigation into the stolen wages of station workers, will the Minister authorise research into matters including, but not limited to how Aboriginal people were treated station by station, what conditions applied, what money the stations received relating to Aboriginal people, how the station was involved with Aboriginal people's money, what permits and regulations applied and what monitoring occurred:

(i) if no to (d), why not?

(a)-(b) 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. Aboriginal people's lives were controlled by a complex network of legislative controls, and cross-jurisdiction administrative practices.

In recognition the Stolen Wages Taskforce was established to investigate the practice of Government control over the wages, savings and entitlements and other monies of Aboriginal people that applied across Western Australia.

The State Government understands the difficult circumstances and disparity that was experienced by Aboriginal people under past legislation and policies. The ex-gratia payment under the Stolen Wages Scheme offered was not an attempt to repay the wages that were withheld but an acknowledgement by the State Government that the practice of stolen wages did occur.

(c) The Honourable member has misinterpreted my response to question on notice No.1120 (c). It was the issue of 'non-Aboriginal people working for rations' which the Honourable Member had queried that was 'outside the scope of the Stolen Wages Taskforce's inquiry'.

(i) The State Government understands and sympathises with the difficult circumstances and disparity that was experienced by Aboriginal people who worked in a range of privately owned enterprises across the State. The State Government's response to the issue of stolen wages was largely based on the advice of the Stolen Wages Taskforce Report, which found that Government controls over Aboriginal people's money during the period 1905 to 1972 were at their most extensive for those living at Government Settlements including Carrolup, Moore River and other institutions across the State. After careful consideration, a decision was made to limit ex gratia payments through the Stolen Wages Reparation Scheme to former residents of Native Welfare institutions where the State Government had direct control over people's money and conditions.

(A) Not applicable.

(B) Refer to (c) (i).

(d) No.

(i) Refer to (c) (i).



Minister for Aboriginal Affairs