

# STOP THE INTERVENTION

stop the intervention collective sydney (stics) bulletin

2012



## Stolen futures: 10 more years of racist shame

### *What the Labor government's Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory legislation will mean*

Explicitly racist laws, which vilify Aboriginal people and culture are being kept or strengthened including:

- \* "Star Chamber" powers held by the Australian Crime Commission (ACC) for investigations in Aboriginal communities, including removal of the right to silence. This despite the ACC dismissing the disgraceful allegations that "pedophile rings" were operating in Indigenous communities, which led then Minister Mal Brough to legislate the powers in 2007.

- \* Prohibition of consideration of Aboriginal customary law and cultural practice in bail and sentencing. This makes NT Aboriginal people the only group of people in Australia for whom the court can not consider the cultural circumstances of an offence. Chief Justice Riley of the NT Supreme Court has said, "Aboriginal offenders do not enjoy the same rights as offenders from other sections of the community... the court must sentence in a partial factual vacuum".

- \* Blanket bans on alcohol on Aboriginal Land, despite consistent opposition from the Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the NT (APO NT) who have said, "The decision regarding alcohol restrictions should be for relevant residents to make... The principal effect of these widely flouted laws has been to further criminalise and alienate many residents".

- \* Increases in penalties for possession of alcohol on Aboriginal Land, including 6 months potential jail time for a single can of beer and 18 months for more than 1.35L of alcohol.

- \* Special powers that allow police to enter houses and vehicles in Aboriginal communities without a warrant, on 'suspicion' of possession of alcohol.

- \* Blanket bans on "sexually explicit or very violent material" on Aboriginal Land. These restrictions serve no purpose other than the perverse stigmatisation of Aboriginal men.

- \* Continued suspension of the operations of the permit system in Aboriginal townships, again in direct contradiction of APO NT who said, "communities on Aboriginal Land feel as though they have lost control... the flow on effects are overwhelmingly seen as negative and counterproductive to community safety".

- \* Complete Commonwealth control over regulations in Community Living Areas and town camps.

- \* Excessive licensing requirements on local grocery stores operating in Aboriginal communities, so strict that they could force store closure.

- \* The Stronger Futures "jobs package" includes 50 new ranger

positions and 100 "traineeships". But this will not compensate for the more than 2000 remaining waged Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) positions the government will cut by next year, the final attack on a vibrant program which was the lifeblood of many communities, employing upwards of 7500 people before the NTER. Proposed amendments to the Social Security Act will see further attacks on the rights of Centrelink recipients. These measures will initially be targeted at NT Aboriginal peoples, but have national implications, especially in areas such as Bankstown or Shepparton where Income Management is being rolled out from July 2012:

- \* An expansion of the School Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM) means chronic school attendance problems could see families have their Centrelink payments slashed.

- \* Staff from any nominated State or Territory authority will have the power to order people onto Income Management in the same way that Child Protection agencies currently do.

- \* Staff from nominated government authorities will be able to pass on information about clients without that individuals knowledge or consent, even if doing so contravenes State or Territory law.

- \* Income Management will follow you even if you move out of an Income Management area.

**STICS public meeting:**

## **Will income management help with child protection?**

**with STICS member and former DOCS**

**Aboriginal policy worker Sue Gillet**

**Monday April 2nd, 6pm**

**NSW Teachers Federation  
conference centre**

**Level 1, 23-33 Mary St, Surry Hills**

for more information visit

[www.stoptheintervention.org](http://www.stoptheintervention.org)

# No to the BasicsCard

## no to compulsory income management

The Australian government plans to spend \$117.5 million over the next five years to introduce Income Management to five “disadvantaged” communities across Australia.

These locations are: Bankstown (NSW) Logan and Rockhampton (Qld) Playford (SA) and Shepparton (Vic).

Income Management is planned to commence 1st July this year. It will be compulsorily applied to welfare recipients who are assessed by Centrelink social workers to be “vulnerable to financial crisis”, with 50% of their payment quarantined.

Parents and legal guardians placed on Income Management by child protection authorities have 70% of their income compulsorily quarantined and 100% of all lump sum payments (eg baby bonus).

Centrelink will issue a ‘BasicsCard’ which can only be used to purchase priority items eg. food, clothing and utilities from government approved outlets such as: Woolworths, Coles, Target, Kmart and Big W.

Income management was first rolled out as part of the Intervention in the Northern Territory in 2007, requiring the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act. It has been widely criticised as it stigmatises and humiliates welfare recipients, wastes money on bureaucratic administration and discriminates specifically against Aboriginal people.

Income Management costs approximately \$4,400 per person per year in administration costs alone. Despite Minister Macklin announcing that the roll-out across Australia would be informed by evidence gained through an evaluation process; there is no independent evaluation or evidence that this regime works.

Centrelink will administer the program, leading to increased Commonwealth staffing levels; this is at a time when Premier O’Farrell announced his government’s intentions to slash thousands of jobs from the public service.

### **The Child protection stream and impact on child protection workers**

Child protection workers will be on the front line of implementing income management. This could seriously impact on relationships with clients. At a time when resources are being withdrawn from the sector, there is a real danger that income management will become a “band-aid” solution, replacing proper case-work.

Under ‘Child protection income management’ Parent/s and/or carers can be placed on Income Management if there are child protection concerns and it is considered that income man-

agement might contribute to improved outcomes for children at risk.

At the sole Bankstown community consultation session, the Commonwealth government officials did not demonstrate any understanding or show any regard about the NSW child protection landscape and the work of child protection caseworkers and specialists.

The session did not provide any detail about the referral process that underpins income management and whether it will reflect the current NSW legislative child protection framework. Key to this issue is whether parents will be informed that they are being referred and by whom; the reason for the referral and the outcome; and whether the parents are placed on compulsory income management and if so; will this confirm the grounds for the referral and result in the removal of their child/ren. This could have a massive impact on the caseload of Community Services caseworkers who may be required to deal with the aftermath of zealous referrals, inexperience, ill-informed and poor decision-making and increased removals and out-of-home-care placements.

Under ‘Stronger Futures’ legislation, Minister Macklin has also given herself the power to nominate any government agency and/or employees as its agents with the power to place people on income management, though there has been no indication of processes that will be followed. These new powers dismiss the expertise, knowledge, capability and qualifications of Community Services caseworkers and seem to suggest that the work done by professional child protection workers is simplistic and can be done by any agency worker that has been nominated by Minister Macklin.

Compulsory income management can bypass the legislative framework and undermine the essential, complex and necessary work involved with working with children at risk and families in crisis.

### **Beating Income Management**

A strong new coalition “Say No to Government’s Income Management Not in Bankstown Not Anywhere” has initiated a moratorium on Income Management – demanding immediate amnesty for those already on the system and a halt to plans for expansion. Its founding statement has been endorsed by more than 50 organisations including unions, church and community groups.

We only have 5 months until income management is rolled out in the trial sites, and in Bankstown momentum is gathering to find ways to beat the implementation.

Child protection workers and other community and public sector workers have a crucial role to play in this campaign.

The Bankstown Coalition and anti-Intervention campaigners are working with trade unions to organise a conference in early June for workers and unionists to discuss how we can stop income management in it’s tracks and fight for resources to be put into our vital support services.

### **Upcoming Union Roundtable on income management in Bankstown:**

STICS and the “Say No to Government Income Management - not in Bankstown not anywhere - Coalition” are organising a roundtable for unions about the impact of income management on the community and on workers, in early June.

For more information and to get involved call Penny on 0402 355 205.

## **Get involved today!**