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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INDEPENDENCE

media release

NEW SOUTH WALES ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL

Media Statement from NSWALC Chairperson Bev Manton

Searing Indictment of Aboriginal Policy

Wednesday, 31 March, 2010

The New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council supports the searing condemnation of the Rudd Government's failed policy approach to Aboriginal Affairs from the former Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia, Alastair Nicholson, QC.

The content of Mr Nicholson's speech to a forum organised in Sydney this week should be required reading for all Australians concerned about the ongoing impact of the Federal Government's intervention into Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory and its proposals to extend key elements across the nation.

Mr. Nicholson's 16-page speech is a withering critique and indictment of the Rudd Labor Government's failure to pay other than lip service to the legitimate rights and aspirations of Aboriginal Australians.

He has rightly asked why the Rudd Government has avoided the "searing moral challenge" of forced assimilation by continuing the Howard Government intervention into NT Aboriginal communities.

Mr Nicholson went on to describe the Government's decision to tie the proposed restoration of the Racial Discrimination Act to the extension of income quarantining in disadvantaged communities across the nation as a "sham."

He said the bill now before the Federal Parliament was merely a ruse to get around the Racial Discrimination Act "by appearing to make it potentially applicable to all welfare recipients."

This would mean welfare recipients "will be beholden to the decisions of public servants as to where and how they spend their money."

Its effect would be to demonise and punish welfare recipients "as a class."

Mr Nicholson described the proposed blanket measures, which are being supported by all parties other than the Greens, as "sloppy, cheap and unfair solutions that reflect lazy politics."

The New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council agrees.

The proposed measures will no doubt be targeted at Aboriginal people in areas outside of the Northern Territory, including New South Wales.

We are fearful the measures contained in the Government's proposed Social Security legislation will pass through the Federal Parliament before Aboriginal people in New South Wales, and elsewhere, are even aware of them, let alone understand their potential impact upon them.

There is little knowledge of the proposed measures in our communities but long term welfare recipients and disengaged youth in those communities will obviously be a major target of them when the Government seeks to extend these measures beyond the Northern Territory next year.

NSWALC commends Mr Nicholson for using his speech to shine a spotlight on the yawning gap between the Rudd Government's rhetoric about re-setting its relationship with our people and the reality of its ongoing pursuit of paternalistic policies.

Bev Manton
Chairperson
NSWALC
March 31, 2010.

Further Information. Chris Graham 0407 555328