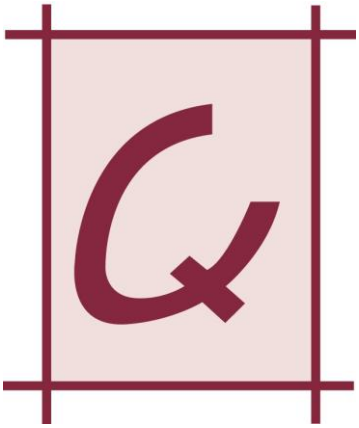

Queensland Council of Unions

Stronger Future Northern Territory Bills Senatorial Submission

February 2012

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Executive Summary.

The Queensland Council of Unions (QCU) is the peak union body in Queensland with 34 affiliated unions covering around 350 000 Queensland workers. The QCU is the state branch of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). The QCU employs a full time Indigenous Industrial Officer, who actively works with affiliates, government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities on industrial and social issues arising in education, training, health and employment. One of the primary objectives of the QCU and its affiliates is to work closely with government, both state and federal, and Industry stakeholders to design and develop pre-employment programs for Indigenous peoples which will result in permanent real jobs. However, the QCU and its affiliates are not just limited to assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with employment issues and workers' rights. The QCU supports the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and opposes any legislation or government policy which limits or removes any of these rights.

The QCU has a strong social policy agenda; part of this agenda includes working closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to advocate for Indigenous rights. This was reinforced by the QCU and 18 affiliated unions signing a Social Compact Agreement with the North Queensland Aboriginal Land Council (NQLC). This Compact sets out a collaborative framework in which trade unions will provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with support in advocating on issues that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land, heritage, culture and human rights.

The following document is a comprehensive response to the following bills:

1. **STRONGER FUTURES IN NORTHERN TERRITORY BILL, 2012**
2. **STRONGER FUTURES IN NT TRANSITIONS BILL, 2012**
3. **SOCIAL SECURITY AMENDMENT BILL, 2012**

INTRODUCTION

Northern Territory Emergency Response

In June, 2007 the Howard Government announced its response to the *Little Children are Sacred* Report. The Government introduced the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), in reaction to the purported child sexual abuse and potential neglect issues raised in the report. However, it should be noted that even though the Government indicated this was the motivation for the NTER, the majority of the 97 recommendations contained in the report were not adopted. Outcomes from the NTER included:

- The *Northern Territory Emergency Response Act 2007* – this Act allowed for alcohol bans, auditing of computers for materials which the Act deemed as prohibited (pornography), the acquisition of Aboriginal land under government leases, the attainment of control over Aboriginal property (for example community stores) and the revision of bail and sentencing laws;[1]
- The *Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Welfare Payment Reform)* Act 2007 which legislated new welfare reforms;

[1] NTER Review Board, *Report of the NTER Review Board,* 2008.

- The *Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Northern Territory Emergency Response and other Measures)* Act 2007, which centred on law enforcement, the overall nature and use of the permit system, prohibited materials and infrastructure.

These measures affected over 600,000 square kilometres of land, inhabited by over 45,500 Aboriginal people who live in more than 500 communities. In statistical
Terms, these laws have affected over seventy per cent of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory.

At the 2009 Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) Congress, Australian unions expressed concern about the introduction of this legislation. These concerns focussed on the suspension of *The Racial Discrimination Act* 1974, the elimination of the permit systems, the forced acquisition of Aboriginal land and property, and the introduction of income management and additionally, on these measures were deemed to protect Aboriginal children.

Following the ACTU Congress, the ACTU Executive and Indigenous Committee received an invitation from Aboriginal Communities in Northern Territory to visit the Northern Territory and see first hand the impact of the NTER.

The QCU's Assistant General Secretary, Indigenous Industrial Officer and representatives from Queensland unions were members of the ACTU delegation to the Northern Territory on the 11, 12 and 13 November 2010[2]. Whilst in the Northern Territory, the ACTU delegation held meetings with the Central Land Council, representatives from Utopia's community organisations, the local mayor of Utopia and visited with some local Aboriginal health services, and talked to staff and patients. Meetings were also held with the Tangentyere Land Council, local community groups, CDEP providers, and with representatives from the Jack Thompson Foundation and individual community members.

The ACTU Delegation was also invited to various remote community townships as well as being invited to view town camps around Alice Springs and to inspect some of the community housing recently constructed under the Federal Government's SIHIP program.

The outcome of the ACTU delegation was that trade unions pledged assistance to the Aboriginal communities of the Northern Territory. Upon its return, the ACTU delegation provided a report to ACTU Executive, recommending the implementation of an ACTU action plan pertaining to the NTER. Representatives from the ACTU have also attended meetings with Ministers Macklin and Albanese to specifically discuss matters specific to the NTER[3]. The ACTU NTER action plan has been developed, endorsed by ACTU Executive, and implementation of the plan is currently underway.

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[2] ACTU delegation included ACTU: Jeff Lawrence (Secretary), Kara Touchie, Amy Schwebel, AEU: Beth Craddy, AWU: Zoe Angus, CFMEU: Lara Watson, Sean Marshall, ETU: Trevor Gauld and Michael Wright, FSU: Michael Clifford, LHMU: Sheena Watt, MUA: Garry Keane, NTEU: Adam Frogley, QCU: Amanda Richards, Gwen Taylor, QNU: Kathy Struber, TCFUA: Michele O'Neil.

[3] The ACTU and ACTU Indigenous Committee have also engaged in discussions with Government with a particular focus on CDEP. A meeting with Jenny Macklin's advisors was held in May 2010 and then a follow-up meeting with Jenny Macklin occurred in mid-October 2010. The focus of conversation with Jenny Macklin was primarily on CDEP; however, discussion was broadened to include sustainable employment and economic empowerment.

Child Safety

The QCU cannot emphasise enough the entire trade union's commitment to the safety and welfare of children as a vital part of its social justice policy. However, it is not worth noting that the majority of the 97 recommendations made under the *Little Children are Sacred Report,* were not implemented by the Howard Government, nor have successive Australian Governments sought to rectify this situation. It is the QCU position that Government should move immediately to imbed these recommendations within its current proposed bills so that they can be implemented.

RECOMMENDATION 1: The Government should immediately implement the 97 recommendations from the *Little Children are Sacred Report* within the Stronger Futures for Northern Territory Bills.

Income Management

Linking welfare payments to school attendance, to the payment of rent on time, or to compliance with an alcohol management plan is a social policy which appears to have emerged from a mutual obligation ideology embraced by the Howard Government. The QCU recognises that the underpinning philosophy of mutual obligation finds its grounding in the ethos of the working class; however, its current application to social welfare provision is problematic and inequitable. The welfare system should ensure that workers are provided with income protection whilst between jobs or that those workers who have been injured are provided with a financial safety net. Imposing income management on those members of society who are in the process of looking for work or who have serious health issues (e.g. alcoholism) could be detrimental in a variety of ways.

In managing 70 per cent of people's income, the Government is potentially depriving individuals of establishing the necessary skills that are required to find employment. TAFE colleges and Registered Training Organisations today provide vocational education courses which ensure participants attain skills the following:

- Financial management,
- Motivational activities,
- Empowerment activities,
- Tasking responsibility,
- Planning skills,
- Communication skills,
- Time management.

These skills are essential to attain and retain employment. To place an individual on income management potentially deprives participants of the opportunity to attain the necessary basic skills required to function in today's society as well as badly needed employability skills. Income management could pose a major impediment on a person's ability to attain work and is detrimental to economic participation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous welfare recipients. It is the QCU position that income management should only occur:

- On a voluntary basis, or
- In extreme circumstances.

It is also QCU position that whilst an individual is on voluntary income management they should have access to training programs which assist with the development of financial planning, budgeting and other necessary employability skills.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Income management should be voluntary and should be imposed on welfare recipients only in extreme circumstances. Whilst on voluntary income management, participants should have access to training programs which assist with the development of financial planning, budgeting and other necessary employability skills.

Provision to link attendance to school with receipt of welfare payments.

The QCU congratulates the government for the intensive consultation conducted in communities within the Northern Territory around this matter. However it is worth noting that the new proposed amendments to the Social Security Act, will affect communities outside of the Northern Territory such, as Logan and Rockhampton in Queensland. It appears from data obtained that the majority of the consultation has been undertaken in the Northern Territory[4] and that the remainder of Australia, including those communities which will be affected by this legislation, have been disregarded. The QCU is very concerned that majority of Australians have not been informed of these new measures and how they will impact on their lives. It is the QCU's position that the government should postpone the implementation of the amendments to the Social Security Act until it has informed all Australians of the intended changes and provided avenues for both Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians with the opportunity to raise their concerns.

As noted by Behrendt and McCausland:

> *Research in Australia and in Indigenous communities in North America shows consistently that the best way to lessen the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is to include Indigenous people in the design and delivery of programs put into communities.*[5]

The QCU is also concerned about the lack of robust evidence that linking welfare payments to school attendance actually delivers the outcomes it is supposed to deliver. As Behrendt and McCausland argue:

> *Developing policy approaches that are going to substantially make a difference in the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children attending school should be addressed by the following strategies:*
>
> - *Advocating an evidenced based approach to the problem and using mechanisms that have been shown to work rather than resourcing strategies where there is no evidence to show that they work or, indeed, there is evidence to show that they are failing. On the data to date, this would mean moving away from the policy of linking welfare reform to school attendance and instead supporting programs such as:*
> - *Breakfast and lunch programs in schools;*

[4] Australian Government, *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory*, report on Consultations 2011. Page 7

[5] Behrendt, L. and McCausland, R. (2008) Welfare payments and school attendance: An analysis of an experimental policy in Indigenous education, an issues paper for the Australian Education Union, Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, University of Sydney, p. 35.

- *Programs that bring members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, particularly Elders, into the school and make them part of the school community;*
- *The training of Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal teacher aides;*
- *The development of curriculum that is culturally appropriate and therefore engages Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with what they are learning;*
- *Programs such as that developed by Aboriginal educationalist Chris Sarra of the Indigenous Education Leadership Institute that combine programs with building confidence and self-esteem (through cultural programs and sport) with programs focusing on attaining academic excellence.*[6]

RECOMMENDATION 3: The Federal Government should postpose the implementation of the amendments to the "Social Security Act " 1990 until the Government has informed all Australians of the intended changes and how these changes will affect them as individuals and has provided avenues for, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians with the opportunity to raise concerns. Further, the Federal Government should consider the research evidence and develop policy and direct resources to those interventions which have been shown to be effective.

Indigenous Employment and Economic Participation.

One of the primary objectives of the QCU and its affiliates is to work closely with governments, both state and federal, as well as industry stakeholders to design and develop pre-employment programs for Indigenous people which result in permanent, 'real' jobs. The QCU would like to commend the Federal Government on its investment of funds into Indigenous training. However, the QCU notes that there is now significant data available that supports the view of the trade union movement that investment into employment and training programs established in collaboration with government, industry, trade unions and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is much more successful in attaining real employment outcomes.

Australia is very diverse in its population. New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory have the largest and most concentrated populations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, each state is unique in terms of the location of Indigenous communities and of the environmental diversity in which these communities live. It is impossible to put together a 'one size fits all' Indigenous employment strategy.

Australia is currently experiencing massive skill shortages, particularly in trade areas. In response to these shortages, industry and governments have responded in a number of ways, including employment of overseas workers, encouraging existing workers to stay in employment longer and

[6] Ibid., pp. 35-36.

various strategies to attract young people into apprenticeships. The first two of these strategies are not economically sustainable and if Australia is to move forward, it needs to invest in its own future.

One strategy that to date has not been adequately explored is the introduction of targeted programs aimed at attracting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to take up apprenticeships.

The current Australian unemployment rate is 5.2per cent however the Indigenous unemployment rate is much higher at 16per cent. In Queensland overall unemployment is around 5.8per cent; however, unemployment of its Indigenous people is 30per cent. In New South Wales, overall unemployment is 4.8per cent, whilst indigenous unemployment is 20per cent. The Northern Territory, which has lowest unemployment in the country with 3.2per cent, has the highest Indigenous unemployment with 38per cent. It is clear that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are a resource which has vastly gone untapped[7]. The quality of life in our Indigenous communities depends on social, cultural and economic well-being of these communities, thus economic welfare depends on a thriving economy. Furthermore, a strategic and sustainable approach to local training and employment makes a substantial contribution to community capacity-building generally. It is the QCU position that industrial development should support, encourage and include our local economies.

With support from the Federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and the State Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI), the QCU and selected Queensland unions have developed Indigenous pre-employment programs which have ensured that participants have undertaken training within the power industry. Out of the 16 participants who commenced in this program, 6 went on to attain full-time electrical apprenticeships, 3 were engaged as power workers and the remaining 4 achieved permanent positions in other industries. These results clearly demonstrate that this type of program is an effective instrument which provides Indigenous people with the necessary skills and knowledge to attain not only a real job, but also provides a clear pathway to the establishment of a career. There is now substantial evidence that such a program provides tangible outcomes for its participants.

The QCU and its affiliates are committed to supporting a significant increase in the real numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait apprenticeships and trainees.

The QCU has committed to work with a variety of employers across the various industries where skill shortages exist, such as construction, manufacturing, maritime, power and logistics. Programs which include various stakeholders, such as government, industry, registered training providers, trade unions, and local Indigenous communities, enable all parties to be engaged in development and implementation. There is considerable data which reinforces the QCU's argument that excellent outcomes result from multi-stakeholder inclusion and subsequent commitment to the development of a professionally skilled Indigenous workforce, achieved through culturally appropriate and effective measures.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The Federal Government should support, with significant funding, Indigenous employment and pre-employment programs, which are a culmination of stakeholders from government, industry, unions, and training organisations working in unison to achieve an employment outcome for Indigenous Australians.

[7] A statistical overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia 2008

It is the QCU position that Indigenous workers are an untapped resource that should be accessed to meet skill shortages in priority areas. Attracting and retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers into real jobs and real career pathways, will work towards closing the gap in unemployment.

In addition, the QCU supports the Government proposed increased auditing and compliance to both state and federal government procurement policies.
The QCU recognises that, as the consumers of skills, employers must acquit their share of responsibility for meeting future skill needs through direct investment in nationally recognised vocational education and training of both their existing workforce and the future workforce including through apprentices and trainees. In addition, the QCU recognises that employers need to identify and redress the under-representation of women and Indigenous people in trade based occupations.

Literacy and numeracy

Studies indicate many adult Indigenous Australians have literacy and numeracy skills which are of a primary school standard. Citing PISA research, Bortoli and Cresswell note that:

> *By the age of 15, more than one-third of Australia's Indigenous students 'do not have the adequate skills and knowledge in reading literacy to meet real-life challenges and may well be disadvantaged in their lives beyond school'*[8]

Given the relatively high levels of literacy and numeracy skills required to undertake most trade entry exams and subsequently apprenticeships, the QCU recommends that all Indigenous targeted pre-employment programs must be based on a targeted pre-vocational course, which amongst other skills, provides participants with the necessary literacy and numeracy skills.

An emerging and significant issue is the low rates of literacy and numeracy amongst Indigenous and non- Indigenous apprentices and trainees. The QCU supports programs, which include mentoring through unions, industry, and government, which address the literacy and numeracy needs of apprentices and trainees to ensure that they are able to effectively participate in their apprenticeships, complete their qualifications and then contribute to the economy in employment.

The QCU is concerned however, that the literacy, language and numeracy, core skills and foundation skills, contained in current pre-vocational and pre-apprenticeship programs don't provide adequate coverage and are in some instances culturally inappropriate in their cognitive delivery. The QCU urges the government in response to the challenges in ensure that future training is available which is proportional, and relevant to the industry in which the training is a prerequisite and that the learning perceptive is culturally applicable.)

Further, to make real progress in closing the literacy gap, the Federal and Northern Territory Governments need to provide substantial additional support for schooling for Aboriginal children. The *Education is the Key* report produced by the Australian Education Union in 2007 made the following recommendations:

[8] Bortoli, L. and Cresswell, J. (2004) Australia's Indigenous Students in PISA 2000: Results from an International Study, Australian Council for Educational Research, Research Monograph 59.

- *That the Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments give an ongoing commitment to resourcing the provision of high quality education from two years of preschool for all Indigenous children through to Year 12 and beyond.*
- *That the Federal Government commit to providing an additional $1.6 billion to the Northern Territory over five years for the provision of teachers and other staff and support services and for the development of necessary infrastructure such as classrooms and teacher housing.*
- *That the Northern Territory Government commit to providing at least an additional $100 million over five years for the provision of support services, the employment and training support of additional Indigenous teachers and the recruitment, training and induction of additional teachers from within and outside the Territory, the professional development of existing staff, the lowering of class sizes, provision of Aboriginal Islander Education Workers (AIEWs) and home liaison officers in every school and the review of curricula and pedagogy.*
- *That all the education recommendations contained within the Little Children are Sacred report be implemented.*
- *That the resourcing model for Northern Territory preschools and schools be restructured to focus on success, with the initial step to be the staffing of preschools and schools on the basis of enrolments, not on attendance.*
- *That governments consult and negotiate partnerships with all communities about the sharing of responsibilities, to ensure that all children can participate successfully in a quality education, and the best structure of education and other services to meet community needs.*[9]

Finally, it should be noted that a focus on 'closing the gap' runs the danger that Indigenous education programs are defined solely in terms of addressing deficits. As Rigney reminds us, the vision for Indigenous education must also include the development of a broad, rigorous, high-quality curriculum that engages students with the realities and challenges of the Twenty-First Century.[10] We do Indigenous children a disservice if we do not have high aspirations and set high expectations for them.

RECOMMENDATION 5: The Government must ensure that all Indigenous vocational education training provides literacy and numeracy training which is targeted to the level required in the identified industry for which the program is a pre-requisite. Additionally, in cooperation with the Northern Territory Government, the Federal Government should commit to substantial additional resourcing for Indigenous schooling.

[9] Australian Education Union (2007) Education is the Key: An education future for Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, AEU, Southbank, Victoria.

[10] Rigney, Lester-Irabinna (2011) Indigenous education: Creating classrooms of tomorrow today, Proceedngs of ACER Research Conference 2011 - Indigenous Education: Pathways to success, Darwin, NT, 8-9 August, http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/RC2011_-_Indigenous_education-_Creating_classrooms_of_tomorrow_today.pdf.

Indigenous Employment Training.

Targeted training courses, for Indigenous Australians should have an employment outcome. Too often in the past Indigenous Australians have been placed on government funded training courses, or in CDEP programs that have resulted in attaining training qualifications, but have not led to full time employment. Government needs to start addressing its funding towards employment outcomes that result in a commitment by industry to employ the participants upon completion and or graduation.

In addition employment programs need to be targeted towards a variety of industries, and at various levels of qualification. The QCU has observed that too often in the past the Indigenous employment programs are targeted toward low level paying positions. The QCU believes that government should start targeting funding towards programs which provide Indigenous Australians with the necessary skills to apply for higher paid positions. The QCU is of the opinion that with industry specific targeted training, Indigenous participants who currently have limited skills can acquire the necessary expertise to engage in higher than basic level entry into the workforce.

RECOMMENDATION 6: The Federal Government should ensure that funding for Indigenous employment or pre-employment programs is linked to employability outcomes. Government procurement policy must ensure that Indigenous training results in employment in full time positions.

In addition, during the ACTU delegation to the Northern Territory, representatives of the local Indigenous communities expressed to the QCU their desire to attain self-determination and independence from welfare by being able to be self employed and attain the skills to be able to run culturally akin business. It is the understanding of the QCU that public TAFE colleges run specific courses which are directed at training Indigenous people in how to run their own small business. Therefore it is the QCU position that these TAFE courses should be made available to communities within the Northern Territory and that government funding should be targeted towards assisting Indigenous Australians to attend these courses.

RECOMMENDATION 7: The Government should ensure that current TAFE courses directed at training Indigenous people to run small business should be made available to Indigenous communities within the Northern Territory and that Government funding should be targeted towards assisting Indigenous Australians to attend these courses.

Carbon Farming

The union movement is committed to fairness, equality and sustainability in the transition to a low carbon economy. The focus, in particular, is on promoting a scheme that respects economic, land and cultural rights; creates secure economic opportunities on country for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; and promotes the participation and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

QCU supports the Carbon Farming Initiative as an important opportunity for remote Aboriginal and

Indigenous groups to be able to develop a culturally appropriate business which can economically sustain members of the community. Indigenous Australians need accessible information to be disseminated to them about the various opportunities and options for access to the scheme. Additionally, groups need a central Indigenous-controlled place for information and advice about the scheme. This information and advice centre could possibly be the peak body proposed by the National Indigenous Climate Change Coalition.

The market for carbon farming is being established before groups have any general sense about the scheme. It is not practical for every Indigenous group to undertake detailed research into the scheme including access, benefits and market mechanisms before entrance. It is with this in mind that we support the development of a research-centred group to develop and provide advice for Indigenous groups wishing to enter the scheme.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people deserve to benefit from a real opportunity to develop economically viable industries and employment 'on country[11]' while respecting customary land management activities.

The QCU position is that Carbon Farming is an initiative which can benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities especially in the Northern Territory, and calls on the government to ensure that at all times, Indigenous communities are provided with adequate business training in order to benefit from this initiative, as well as legislative protection of their land, sea, culture and heritage.

RECOMMENDATION 8: Carbon Farming is an initiative which can benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities especially in the Northern Territory, and the QCU calls on government to ensure that at all times, Indigenous communities are provided, with adequate business training in order to benefit from this initiative, as well as legislative protection of their land, sea, culture and heritage.

Caring for Country

The QCU commends the Federal Governments *Working on Country* program, which recognises that protecting and conserving the environment is a shared responsibility but also acknowledges the contribution that traditional owners have made to the protection of their traditional lands and the need to acknowledge this whilst also providing sustainable employment for Indigenous people.

Tackling Alcohol and Substance Abuse.

Firstly it should be duly noted that alcohol abuse is an illness suffered by many Australians and is not confined to Aboriginal peoples.

However, the QCU representatives who were part of the ACTU delegation were informed on several occasions of the widespread problems within communities related to alcohol, gambling and substance abuse. The general consensus from Indigenous people within the communities of

[11] Country' is a generic term to describe the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional estates

Northern Territory was that alcohol management should be tackled using a holistic approach which includes collaboration between communities, government, health professionals, and community services. The emphasis should be on rehabilitation and support for those family members affected by their love ones addiction rather than enforcement and applied penalties.

The QCU supports the government's proposed initiative for communities to develop their own alcohol management plans; however the QCU has serious concerns regarding the bureaucratic process for the approval of these plans. In addition, ten days to lodge a formal submission in response to a Ministerial decision is a very tight time line and would not ensure that respondents have sufficient time to adequately correlate resources whilst simultaneously compiling a comprehensive response. Each alcohol management plan should be developed and tailored to meet each individual community's needs, whilst ensuring adequate resources are available to tackle treatment requirements, diversionary programs, education, and health promotion and also incorporate early intervention programs.

The QCU also has concerns regarding other substances which are being utilized when alcohol is no longer available in the community, such as glue, paint and petrol sniffing. Any alcohol management plan must ensure that there are measures put into place to counteract other alternative substance abuses. The position of the QCU is that alcohol abuse should not be tackled on a fragmented basis, but should be part of a holistic program which also includes rehabilitation programs and addresses the mental health and well-being of the entire community.

RECOMMENDATION 9: The QCU supports communities being allowed to develop their own alcohol management plans in consultation and partnership with government, health professionals, and community organisations. The development of alcohol management plans should be adequately resourced and long-term rehabilitation and prevention programs should not be subjected to budgetary restraints.

Homelands

The QCU believes that, in compliance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people[12], Indigenous people should be allowed to live on their traditional lands as well as receive the acceptable level of housing and infrastructure expected by all other Australians. The QCU has serious concerns with the government's provision that all Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory who attain a year 12 qualification will be given employment within the proposed hub towns.

Whilst the QCU commends the Federal Government for trying to close the gap in employment for Indigenous peoples, it does not agree that full-time jobs should only be available in hub towns. The

[12] Article 10 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – states "Indigenous people shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the Indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible with the option of return'.

QCU recommends that the Federal Government make also make available positions in homeland communities through the adequate funding of local shires to provide municipal services and subsequently local jobs for local people.

RECOMMENDATION 10: The QCU commends the Federal Government for trying to close the gap in employment for Indigenous peoples however those full time jobs should not be restricted to hub towns. The QCU recommends that the Federal Government make also make available positions in homeland communities through the adequate funding of local shires to provide municipal services and subsequently local jobs for local people.

Conclusion

The QCU believes that it is imperative that the Senate Inquiry seriously considers the recommendations that accompany this submission and respectfully requests that the QCU be afforded the opportunity to address the Senate Inquiry. The QCU will be able to elaborate on the ground-breaking Indigenous employment initiatives conducted by and currently underway in trade unions and other stakeholders, including industry and government. The QCU would also like the opportunity to recount the experiences of Queensland representatives who visited Indigenous communities as part of the 2010 ACTU delegation to the Northern Territory.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS.

1. **RECOMMENDATION:** Government should immediately implement the 97 recommendations from the *Little Children are Sacred Report* in its current Stronger Futures for Northern Territory Bills.
2. **RECOMMENDATION** Income management should be voluntary and should be imposed on welfare recipients only in extreme circumstances. Whilst on voluntary income management, participants should have access to training programs which assist with the development of financial planning, budgeting and other necessary employability skills.
3. **RECOMMENDATION:** The Federal Government should postpose the implementation of the amendments to the "Social Security Act " 1990 until the Government has informed all Australians of the intended changes and how these changes will affect them as individuals and has provided avenues for, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians with the opportunity to raise concerns. Further, the Federal Government should consider the research evidence and develop policy and direct resources to those interventions which have been shown to be effective.
4. **RECOMMENDATION:** The Federal Government should support, with significant funding, Indigenous employment and pre-employment programs, which are a culmination of stakeholders from government, industry, unions, and training organisations working in unison to achieve an employment outcome for Indigenous Australians.
5. **RECOMMENDATION:** The Government must ensure that all Indigenous vocational education training provides literacy and numeracy training which is targeted to the level required in the identified industry for which the program is a pre-requisite. Additionally, in cooperation with the Northern Territory Government, the Federal Government should commit to substantial additional resourcing for Indigenous schooling.

6. **RECOMMENDATION:** The Federal Government should ensure that funding for Indigenous employment or pre-employment programs is linked to employability outcomes. Government procurement policy must ensure that Indigenous training results in employment in full time positions.
7. **RECOMMENDATION:** The Government should ensure that current TAFE courses directed toward training Indigenous people to attain the skills to run small business should be made available to Indigenous communities within the Northern Territory and that Government funding must be targeted towards assisting Indigenous Australians to access these courses.
8. **RECOMMENDATION:** Carbon Farming is an initiative which can benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities especially in the Northern Territory, and the QCU

calls on government to ensure that at all times, Indigenous communities are provided, with adequate business training in order to benefit from this initiative, as well as legislative protection of their land, sea, culture and heritage.

9. **RECOMMENDATION**: The QCU supports communities being allowed to develop their own alcohol management plans in consultation and partnership with government, health professionals, and community organisations. The development of alcohol management plans should be adequately resourced and long-term rehabilitation and prevention programs should not be subjected to budgetary restraints.
10. **RECOMMENDATION**: The QCU commends the Federal Government for trying to close the gap in employment for Indigenous peoples however those full time jobs should not be restricted to hub towns. The QCU recommends that the Federal Government make also make available positions in homeland communities through the adequate funding of local shires to provide municipal services and subsequently local jobs for local people.

15 February 2011

Amanda Richards

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Queensland Council of Unions.