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QLD Government's insults Aboriginal workers again

The Queensland Government's amended Stolen Wages settlement to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers has come under attack from Indigenous rights organisation, ANTaR.

ANTaR Queensland President, Monique Bond said the changes announced by the government were mean spirited, insulting and racially discriminatory.

Ms Bond said the Government's changes would not resolve the Stolen Wages issue or overcome the widespread criticisms of the Queensland scheme.

Under the changes announced today, successful claimants would receive top up payments of either \$1500 or \$3000, even though this remained a fraction of the wages withheld from them.

People who declined to make a claim because they considered the initial Queensland Government offer to be unsatisfactory will not be given the opportunity to participate in the amended scheme.

The remaining \$20 million in funds allocated for Stolen Wages will be placed in a Trust Fund, even though this is against the wishes of a majority of Stolen Wages claimants.

"Incredibly, the Government is repeating the same mistake that led to the scandal of Stolen Wages in the first place – creating a trust fund because it doesn't believe that Indigenous workers are capable of managing their own money," Ms Bond said.

Ms Bond said that while the new scholarships announced by the Government would assist Indigenous students, education was a core government responsibility and should not be paid for with money stolen from Indigenous workers.

Ms Bond said that no additional funds have been allocated to the scheme even though the original \$55.6 million is only around one ninth of the monies withheld from Queensland Indigenous workers.

"We need to remember that the money in dispute is not taxpayers' funds but the wages earned by Indigenous workers and never paid to them because of government negligence and fraud. No other group of Queenslanders would be treated in such a heartless way by a government that claims to stand up for the rights of working people," she said.

Ms Bond said the Queensland Stolen Wages scheme remained significantly more restrictive and less generous than the one introduced in NSW. Unlike the Queensland scheme, in NSW claimants are fully reimbursed for money owed in today's value.

"Ministers in the Bligh Cabinet hope that its latest announcement will off kill the issue of Stolen Wages. But this issue will not go away until the Government treats some of its elderly and most vulnerable citizens with the fairness and decency they deserve," Ms Bond said.

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