

Stop the Intervention Collective Fact Sheet: The Government's "Consultation" Process

SUMMARY

Jenny Macklin's impending expansion of income management measures across Australia, and continuation of other Intervention measures, is based on the release of the results of her consultations. However, this process was a travesty. Consultations implies an interest in the views of those consulted: as this fact sheet notes, the government made no secret of being committed to continuing the Intervention before the consultations started. The consultation process was riddled with pro-Intervention biases. It has also been shrouded in secrecy – the public evidence on the record raises grave concerns that in fact, communities consulted opposed the Intervention. Rather than a process of genuine consultations, Macklin delivered a vulgarly rigged public opinion survey.

THE CONSULTATIONS: Summary of flaws

They were procedurally biased

1. Their facilitators were public servants, and sometimes the very authorities imposed by the intervention
2. These authorities then had to write reports on what those consulted thought, despite the obvious conflict of interest
3. In some instances, facilitators were seen being openly supportive of the Intervention
4. The facilitators delivered a pro-Intervention message to those consulted, and told them the Government wanted to continue the Intervention

Government reports on them are unreliable and lack transparency

1. CIRCA – who the Government contracted to independently monitor the consultations – found that the reports by the public servants on public meetings distorted the views of those consulted in a pro-Intervention manner.

2. The private (Tier 1) meetings that the Government crucially relies on were completely unmonitored.

3. The Government claims that public (tier 2) meetings also showed majority support for key intervention measures, such as income management. This is not substantiated by any evidence on the public record.

- a. CIRCA monitored 15 of 109 Tier 2 meetings. They found that "participants spoke very passionately about not wanting income management to stay", that Government reports failed to register the levels of "anger and frustration" with these measures, that the "extent of negativity" towards these measures was high (etc).

- b. The Will they be heard? report was based on the transcripts of three public meetings. These showed strong objections to the Intervention, including income management.

4. According to Alastair Nicholson, those who have requested reports on their Tier 1 and 2 meetings have been ignored. When the Greens urged these reports be released onto the public record, Labor and the Liberals combined in the Senate to vote this motion down.

They're not consultations if the Government doesn't care what those consulted have to say

1. The Government organised four types (Tiers) of meetings. Tiers 3 and 4 were meetings with Indigenous leaders and peak Indigenous organisations. The Government found these meetings showed opposition to key Intervention measures, such as income management and five year leases. Macklin has not explained why she has ignored what she was told in these meetings.
2. By her own admission, a third of public meetings didn't have interpreters. We don't know about how many interpreters were available in other meetings.
3. According to CIRCA, the reports by fa-

Facilitators on the consultations did not include feedback on grievances raised outside of questions asked, or understated these grievances. This includes housing, despite the Government's housing program being a major measure of the Intervention.

4. In the Government's report on the consultations, some of the "common themes and messages" showed strong opposition to the Intervention, yet does not explain why these feelings were not seriously addressed.

a. There was a "pervasive feeling amongst Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory that different standards have been applied to them, compared with other Australians"

b. "Many people" said that they "had felt hurt, humiliated and confused by the way the NTER had initially been implemented" – even though the NTER has not changed, and its key measures will continue unchanged for years to come

c. Those consulted were "very critical" of the "lack of initial consultation, the blanket approach to measures, the embarrassment caused by the introduction of income management" and other issues: none of this has changed, or shows signs of changing in the future

5. The facilitators explained to those consulted that the Government thought the Intervention was going well, and wanted to continue it. The consultations were to seek feedback on possible changes: not abolishing the Intervention altogether

6. According to the Government's Future Directions report, the Government announced its budget for 2009-10 on 12 May 2009. This is a month before it began its "consultations" in the NT. Macklin claims her policies are based on what communities said in the consultations: why did she increase funding for it a month before the consultations started?

LOOKING AT THE EVIDENCE, LOOKING AWAY FROM IT

Macklin says it is "important to look at the evidence". Yet she has ignored the repeated

criticisms by UN special rapporteurs, by Amnesty International, by the authors of the Little Children are Sacred report. She has ignored her own Government's progress report on January-June 2009, released only a few weeks before the consultations report, which found that assault, domestic violence and child abuse had increased. Alcohol and drug related crimes have also increased. The Government ombudsman found people "often" complained about the high prices of healthy food in community stores, which were imposed by the Intervention. The progress report also reveals gross underfunding of crucial services. From a budget of hundreds of millions, the government spends \$2.6 on drug and alcohol treatment services, funding 2 nurses and 14 community support workers across 73 NT communities. They're funding only 5 child protection workers.



Elders from Ampilatwatja at the protest camp set up outside the Prescribed Area in opposition to the Northern Territory Intervention.

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