

Thank you for your email about the Commonwealth intervention in the Northern Territory.

For those of us who believe in a compassionate, progressive society, there is no more fundamental obligation than ensuring the protection of the vulnerable. Every child has the right to live free of abuse, and to a positive, nurturing home environment.

In May this year, on the 40th anniversary of 1967 referendum, I committed

- to eliminate the 17 year gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous babies born today within a generation,
- to at least halve the rate of Indigenous infant mortality among babies and separately for children aged under five within a decade,
- to at least halve the difference in the rate of Indigenous students at years 3, 5 and 7 who fail to meet reading, writing and numeracy benchmarks within 10 years.

These long term goals were underpinned by a \$261 million funding commitment to early childhood development, child and maternal health, parenting support and intensive literacy and numeracy education — a plan that is sustained and comprehensive.

Throughout the last six weeks, Federal Labor has articulated a simple test when assessing the Government's intervention into the Northern Territory: whether it improves the safety and security of children.

While this legislation represents a major intervention in and challenge to the lives of many Territorians, Federal Labor believes, on balance, that it satisfies this test. That is why we have supported it.

Federal Labor moved amendments to retain the permit system on Northern Territory Aboriginal land in town areas and public roads because it helps to keep children safe and secure. Federal Labor also moved amendments to expand the categories of people who would not require a permit in the townships to Government agents such as doctors, and for journalists. The Northern Territory Police Association strongly supports the retention of the permit system because it adds another layer of protection against grog runners, drug dealers and paedophiles entering Aboriginal communities.

The importance of this intervention also requires community confidence in Parliament's belief these are in fact special measures to benefit Aboriginal people. We believe that a blanket exemption from part II of the Racial Discrimination Act is unhelpful and unnecessary. Federal Labor moved amendments to remove this blanket exemption.

The Anderson/Wild report Little Children are Sacred noted that severe overcrowding in Indigenous homes - up to 20 people per home in many places - directly contributes to child abuse and recommended a "critical mass construction [of homes]."

The scale of the Indigenous housing shortage cannot be overstated.

The Government proposes a five year lease over the Aboriginal townships to facilitate immediate investment in additional housing and maintenance.

Underlying title in the land will remain in Aboriginal hands – land rights are preserved. The proposed lease is limited to five years, unless terminated sooner. Rent will be paid and just terms compensation can be independently determined by a court.

Importantly, any major works or commercial development that will outlive the five year lease will have to have the consent of the relevant land council before being progressed. There is an ongoing opportunity for commercial and economic development by Traditional Owners while the five year lease is in place through the normal leasing arrangements.

The legislation also gives the Commonwealth significant new powers in relation to the town camp leases. Federal Labor believes that effective partnerships with lessors and negotiated outcomes should obviate the need for compulsory acquisition.

Federal Labor is determined to improve housing and infrastructure. We also want to see more economic development in these townships. That is why we have moved an amendment to require a review to assess, after 12 months, progress in establishing infrastructure, housing and economic development in both the townships and the town camps. If the situation has stalled or become mired in legal dispute and is not delivering outcomes, a Federal Labor Government will act to fix it.

Federal Labor also supports the changes in this legislation that cover

- the tough restrictions on alcohol with large fines and strict penalties;
- the ban on pornography and;
- welfare payments being spent for the benefit of children and to make sure children go to school.

In relation to Northern Territory specific welfare measures, Federal Labor moved an amendment to review the operation of income management at the end of the first period of 12 months.

Federal Labor has committed to pay for teachers for the 2,000 Indigenous children currently not enrolled to go to school in the Territory and will work with the Northern Territory Government to ensure there are enough classrooms, teacher housing and teacher's assistance.

Federal Labor has also committed \$200 million for an extra 500 Federal Police officers over the next five years. This will enable the AFP to better handle a wide range of tasks across the nation including child sexual abuse matters in the Indigenous communities. Federal Labor will also implement an Indigenous Australia AFP Recruitment Strategy, to increase employment and broaden the force's expertise, particularly in local languages.

Federal Labor's approach is to move forward in a reciprocal partnership with Indigenous Australians. We will earn their trust by showing our real commitment to

delivering a more sustainable future for Indigenous children, and the communities they live in.

My speech in Parliament on the legislation can be viewed [HYPERLINK "http://parlinfoweb.aph.gov.au/piweb/TranslateWIPILink.aspx?Folder=HANSARDR&Criteria=DOC\\_DATE:2007-08-07;SEQ\\_NUM:72;"](http://parlinfoweb.aph.gov.au/piweb/TranslateWIPILink.aspx?Folder=HANSARDR&Criteria=DOC_DATE:2007-08-07;SEQ_NUM:72;) here.

The speech by Jenny Macklin, Labor's spokesperson for Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation can be viewed [HYPERLINK "http://www.alp.org.au/media/0807/msia080.php"](http://www.alp.org.au/media/0807/msia080.php) here.

Thank you again for your valuable contribution.

Kind regards,

Kevin Rudd  
Federal Labor Leader  
Member for Griffith