

# Stolen Wages

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## AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN STOLEN WAGES INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

*The Stolen Wages issue is one of the great workplace scandals in Australian history.*

Australian state legislation from the late 1800s established government control of the lives of many Indigenous Australians, including control of financial earnings and entitlements.

*“The Stolen Wages issue is one of the greatest workplace scandals in our history.”*

What this meant in practice is that a large percentage of the wages, federal child endowment and related welfare payments that were made to Aboriginal people in Queensland over many decades was put aside into government run trust accounts and other accounts. Only a fraction of it was ever paid to the individuals who were legally entitled to those wages and payments.

**Senator Andrew Bartlett**  
**Spokesperson on**  
**Indigenous Affairs**

Senator Andrew Bartlett initiated a national Senate inquiry into the issue of Stolen Wages which brought down 6 unanimous recommendations from Senators across all parties on 7 December, 2006

Senate Committee Recommendations:

1. That the Commonwealth Government and state governments facilitate unhindered access to their archives for Indigenous people and their representatives for the purposes of researching the Indigenous stolen wages issue as a matter of urgency.
2. That the Ministerial Council on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs agree on joint funding arrangements for:
  - a. an education and awareness campaign in Indigenous communities in relation to stolen wages issues; and
  - b. preliminary legal research on Indigenous stolen wages matters.
3. That the Commonwealth Government provide funding in the next budget to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies to conduct a national oral history and archival project in relation to Indigenous stolen wages.
4. That:
  - a. the Western Australian Government:
  - b. urgently consult with Indigenous people in relation to the stolen wages issue; and
  - c. establish a compensation scheme in relation to withholding, underpayment and non-payment of Indigenous wages and welfare entitlements using the New South Wales scheme as a model, and



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- d. the Commonwealth Government conduct preliminary research of its archival material in relation to the stolen wages issues in Western Australia.
5. That the Commonwealth Government in relation to the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory, and the state governments of South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria:
  - a. urgently consult with Indigenous people in relation to the stolen wages issue;
  - b. conduct preliminary research of their archival material; and
  - c. if this consultation and research reveals that similar practices operated in relation to the withholding, underpayment or non-payment of Indigenous wages and welfare entitlements in these states, then establish compensation schemes using the New South Wales scheme as a model.
6. That the Queensland Government revises the terms of its reparations offer so that:
  - a. Indigenous claimants are fully compensated for monies withheld from them;
  - b. further time is provided for the lodgement of claims;
  - c. claimants are able to rely on oral and other circumstantial evidence where the records held by the state are incomplete or are allegedly affected by fraud or forgery;
  - d. new or further payments do not require claimants to indemnify the Queensland Government; and
  - e. the descendants of claimants who died before 9 May 2002 are included within the terms of the offer.

The failure of some state governments to properly remedy such a significant and clearly acknowledged injustice not only perpetuates that injustice, but casts a pall of insincerity over government demands on Indigenous organisations to improve their standards of accountability. It perpetuates a continuing and justified legacy of mistrust of governments amongst many Indigenous people.

The Democrats call on all State and Territory institutions and individuals who are committed to justice and reconciliation to publicly condemn the injustices imposed through the stolen wages and to respond promptly to the Senate inquiry report.

It is ridiculous that at a time when our national industrial relations laws are a matter of extensive public debate that we are yet to see a just settlement of this long-standing workplace scandal.

We believe that proper reparation and acknowledgement must be made to all Indigenous people and their descendents who have been deprived of their rightfully earned wages and entitlements.



## CONTACT US

(03) 9416 1880

Lv 1, 62 Wellington Parade, East Melbourne VIC 3002

[inquiries@democrats.org.au](mailto:inquiries@democrats.org.au)

Authorised by Jack Evans, 5 Poinciana Place, Wanneroo WA 6065  
Printed by Senator Lyn Allison, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600