

MEDIA STATEMENT

30 May 2007

GOLDFIELDS LAND & SEA COUNCIL Aboriginal Corporation (Representative Body)

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GLSC welcomes stolen wages taskforce

The State Government announcement of a task force to investigate stolen wages of indigenous workers is welcome.

The GLSC called last December for a State Government program to compensate Aboriginal people who were subjected to abusive or unfair practices last century, including underpayment or non-payment of wages and welfare benefits. Under various statutes, the State Government had responsibility at the time to protect Aboriginal people from abuses.

Last year the GLSC made a submission to the *Unfinished Business: Indigenous Stolen Wages* report of the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee, documenting abuses that occurred throughout the Goldfields in the pastoral industry and at some missions through to the late 1960s, sometimes with government knowledge.

“Crucial to the effectiveness of the taskforce inquiry will be its terms of reference, which must include welfare benefits and pensions, as well as ‘stolen wages’, and must include the activities of pastoral properties and missions, as well as government,” said Executive Director Brian Wyatt.

“The State Government must also throw open to the taskforce all relevant records in its possession, including records of reported injustices.

“For the Goldfields alone, several million dollars a year (2007 value) could have been denied Aboriginal people throughout the first half of last century.

“Indications are that the annual indigenous payroll for Goldfields pastoral properties in the 1960s was the in the order of \$9 million (2007 value). If the shortfall in wages up to the 1960s was limited to just 25% then about \$150 million would be owed.

“Substantial sums entrusted to some Goldfields missions as pensions for elderly people in their care also appear unaccounted for. At one mission, in return for a ten shilling a week government accommodation subsidy, Aboriginal people were provided bush shelters and tents with no toilet facilities, and were expected to hunt their own food.

“Recompense is vital, given the profound impact that these abuses have had on the lives of individuals, their families and communities. In many cases the abuses denied people their sole means of accumulating cash reserves, which might otherwise have enabled them to chart different life courses, including economic independence,” Mr Wyatt said.

The *Unfinished Business: Indigenous Stolen Wages* report is available at:

http://www.apf.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon_ctte/stolen_wages/index.htm

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