

Stolen Wages Update 4

APRIL 2004

QPILCH search for legal wins

Discussions between the Stolen Wages Working Group and a group of lawyers in Brisbane late last year have resulted in the publication of a questionnaire aimed at locating stolen wages claimants who want to pursue their case through the courts in Queensland.

Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House (QPILCH) Coordinator Tony Woodyatt said the form had been developed to help people who had decided not to take the Queensland Government's Reparations & Savings offer and wanted to know if their case could proceed to litigation.

QPILCH is an independent office that assesses, researches and refers requests for legal advice and assistance to legal professionals who provide assistance for free or reduced fees.

"One of QPILCH's aims is to identify major issues of public interest needing legal assistance best provided by private lawyers and in accordance with this aim QPILCH is currently investigating claims by Aboriginal people who don't intend to accept the Queensland Government's offer of settlement," Mr Woodyatt said.

"We are seeking a few of the best cases that can test the Government's legal liability for the work and savings scheme, so the form is for people who won't accept that offer and want to know if their case has merit to proceed to litigation.

"It will also help us to find those who may have a reasonable case quickly and efficiently."

Researcher Dr Ros Kidd said the lawyers' group was willing to work pro bono (for minimal or no cost to the plaintiff) to bring cases to the courts.

"Some people have already started discussions with lawyers in Brisbane to recover stolen wages, under award wages, mission wages and deceased estates and QPILCH has prepared this form so more people might think about this option," Dr Kidd said.

"Now there is the chance of private legal representation for people who might otherwise not have that option which has been a major concern for the Stolen Wages Working Group for some time."

Stolen Wages Working Group executive member Bob Weatherall said the move was good news for those who wanted to make a case out of their claims.

"They've made it really clear that this is only for those who don't want to take the Queensland Government's offer and this might be one of the only opportunities people will have to pursue an equitable and just outcome for their stolen wages," he said.

Townsville elder Yvonne Butler said she welcomed the development.

"I don't like the indemnity and I have family members who are very concerned about signing away inheritances," she said. "Anything that will help us in our fight for justice and closure on this issue is very welcome."

For more information contact the Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House on 07 3012 9773 or via email at contact@qpilch.org.au For more information about QPILCH visit their website at <http://www.qpilch.org.au> Copies of the QPILCH form have been distributed to the Aboriginal Coordinating Council for distribution to DOGIT communities and can be obtained from Stolen Wages Working Group members including FAIRA Aboriginal Corporation and ANTAr Qld.

A recent re-visit to Melbourne by Lanora Jackson to speak on International Women's Day was a huge success while during the same week ACC Executive member Peter Guivarra spent three days re-visiting the very solid support the Queensland campaign has had from Victorian unions. Lanora and Peter are pictured below working in solidarity with the AMWU, International Women's Day Collective, VTHC, ACTU & AAWL representatives and workers.



More than 'talking the talk', Townsville's 'walking the walk'!

Townsville elders and their families have 'walked the walk' following a meeting held earlier this year updating the community on the stolen wages campaign.

Stolen Wages Postcards, Speakers Kits and Update Newsletters have all been put to good use during ongoing visits to local community groups and liaison with Trades Hall and union organisers.

Elder Yvonne Butler said the response from women and migrant groups she had spoken to, armed with the speakers kits, postcards and her own story, had been extremely receptive.

"We've had people teary-eyed after realising how little of our real history they knew and they've all offered to write letters, send the cards and use their networks to spread the word," she said. "One of the groups has offered whatever support we need."

Mrs Butler also said the union movement in Townsville was aware of the issue with material being circulated regularly and an article expected to appear shortly in their local Trades Hall newsletter.

"The Townsville Trades Hall has also invited us to speak to their full council meeting later this month and march

with them on May Day," she said.

"And their secretary has promised to talk about the issue in her speech on the day so we're doing a poster for that to encourage the whole community to come along and see the support they have out there for themselves.

"It's been really positive up here and I hope to see all this work make a difference one day, not just for me but for my family and all the others out there who would finally like to see some justice in this for us."

Members of the Stolen Wages Working Group are keen to assist if other Queensland communities would like to be updated on the progress of the stolen wages campaign. For more information contact Christine Howes on 0419 656 277 or via email on chowes@hotmail.net.au

Who is the Stolen Wages Working Group?

The Stolen Wages Working Group meets about once a month and consists of elders, claimants, family & other Aboriginal community representatives for the former workers affected by stolen wages; trade union representatives; ANTaR and other concerned community groups and individuals. See below for contact details.

Aboriginal members who have been prominent in the campaign have included ACC Councillors Alf Lacey, Peter Guivarra, Thomas Hudson and Moira Bosen, FAIRA Cultural Officer Bob Weatherall, Brisbane elder Aunty Ruth Hegarty, 4AAA's Tiga Bayles and QUT lecturer Victor Hart.

Main Messages of the Stolen Wages Campaign:

- 1.. The current offer should be considered a down payment.*
- 2.. The current offer should be extended to families of deceased workers (as per the NSW proposal).*
- 3.. Closure for the stolen wages issue must be re-negotiated directly with Aboriginal communities.*

National Report Update from Dr Ros Kidd

Attempts to obtain funding for secretariat needs to coordinate a National Report on the Stolen Wages have so far been unsuccessful, but the pursuit will continue says Dr Ros Kidd (pictured).

"The Report will be repackaged to emphasise the need for historical research into work and wages rather than the current emphasis on the demand for justice, but the pursuit for funds will continue," she said.

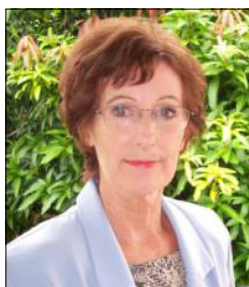
"In the meantime, and following the strong campaigning by the Stolen Wages Working Group through the unions and the media, groups are forming in other states to research government policies and to work with people who are

seeking information about their work and wages."

Dr Kidd said a class action of more than 40 cases was well underway in NSW through the Public Interest Advocacy Group (similar to QPILCH in Queensland).

"It is hoped that National Report volunteers can assist and advise these groups to maximise the collection of relevant information, which can later be analysed and compiled into a single Report for the nation," she said.

For more information or regular updates on the National Report contact Dr Kidd at roskidd@linksdisk.com or International Human Rights Lawyer Helen Burrows at nationalreport@hotmail.com



WHO TO CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Keep up to date with developments and find out what you can do from the following people and organisations:

FAIRA: (07) 3391 4677: <http://www.faira.org> ACC: (07) 4044 2999: <http://www.accq.org.au>

The Queensland Council of Unions: (07) 3846 2468: <http://www.qcu.asn.au>

ANTaR Qld: (07) 3844 9800 <http://www.antar.qld.org.au> Contact: antarqld@dovenetq.net.au

Australia Asia Worker Links: <http://www.aawl.org.au> Contact: aawl@aawl.org.au

Stolen Wages Postcards are available from 4AAA in Brisbane, 4US in Rockhampton, 4K1G in Townsville & 4C1M in Cairns.

For email information and contacts or to join a Stolen Wages Update list write to chowes@hotmail.net.au

Background Information: Dr Ros Kidd: <http://www.linksdisk.com/roskidd>