

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Stolen wages a national issue**

Today's Queensland Council of Unions stolen wages rally and launch of a national postcard campaign in Brisbane will help highlight the national significance of the stolen wages issue, according to Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR).

"The support of the wider union movement, including the CCU and ACTU, in highlighting the denial of Indigenous workers' wages and savings as an industrial issue is an important development", ANTaR National Coordinator, Dr David Cooper said.

"This is foremost an issue about justice for workers – the fundamental principle that workers, whoever they are, provide their labour by choice and be paid fairly for their work".

For many Queensland Indigenous workers over the past century neither condition applied. They were forced to work and yet received no wages or only a fraction of their due. Over time, these stolen wages were appropriated by the government for other purposes. It is estimated that the amount withheld is over \$500 million.

Through their enforced labour and stolen wages, Indigenous workers contributed significantly to the development of Queensland, yet the Queensland Government has seen fit to make an inadequate compensation offer of only \$55 million, with onerous conditions attached which further deprive Indigenous workers of their right to pursue justice through the legal system.

"This is not only grossly unfair, but morally unconscionable", Dr Cooper said. "Where's the fair go for Indigenous workers in Queensland?"

ANTaR has recognised the issue's national significance by making it one of its major national campaigns.

"The fact is that similar practices happened in other states and territories. ANTaR will be supporting the production of a national report on the issue and the establishment of inquiries in each state and territory", Dr Cooper said.

"Meanwhile the Queensland Government has an opportunity to do justice to its commendable decision to address the stolen wages issue by reconsidering its inadequate offer to Indigenous workers."

"ANTaR urges the Queensland Government to re-enter negotiations with Indigenous representatives to find a solution that is fair and just for Indigenous workers".

**For interviews or further information** – please contact Dr David Cooper 0418 486310.