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## **Senate Inquiry urges action on Indigenous stolen wages.**

There was compelling evidence that Governments around Australia systematically withheld and mismanaged Indigenous wages and entitlements over decades, a Senate inquiry report tabled in Parliament today has found.

The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee unanimously considered that the practice known as stolen wages, “seriously discriminated” against Indigenous people “across generations.”

The Committee said that it “was imperative that Governments take immediate action to address these injustices.”

“It would be an abrogation of moral responsibility to delay any further, particularly with the knowledge that the age and infirmity of the Indigenous people affected by these practices limit their capacity to pursue claims,” the report said.

The committee recommended that State and Territory Governments investigate the extent of stolen wages practices and consider introducing schemes to return payments to Indigenous people.

In particular, it considered there was sufficient evidence for the Western Australian Government to urgently establish a compensation scheme.

It also urged the Federal Government to fund an oral and archival research project into the practice of stolen wages around Australia.

The Committee singled out the Queensland Government for particular criticism, saying that the scheme it had introduced was marked by “a number of serious deficiencies.” It recommended the Queensland scheme be revised to make it fairer for Indigenous people.

Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) National Director, Gary Highland urged state, territory and the federal governments to urgently implement the Committee’s recommendations.

“The Senate Committee has confirmed what Indigenous people have been saying for years – that governments around Australia controlled and withheld the wages and savings belonging to Aboriginal people. Much of this money went into public revenue or disappeared through fraud or negligence,” Mr Highland said.

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## TWO

Mr Highland said that many of the workers whose wages were taken faced a double injustice because they were also members of the Stolen Generations.

“They were removed from their families and culture and then had their wages and entitlements removed from them,” he said.

“The twin practices of child removal and stolen wages took many Indigenous people into a form of cultural and economic exile, denied a place in Indigenous society and then prevented from gaining the economic stake so essential to enabling decent life in the mainstream,” Mr Highland said.

In tabling the report, a number of Senators commented that their Inquiry merely scratched the surface of the stolen wages issue.

Senator Andrew Bartlett said in his additional comments in the report that Governments should implement properly funded employment and education programs targeted to assist young Indigenous people to overcome the intergenerational poverty caused by stolen wages.

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