

# **MEDIA RELEASE 2<sup>ND</sup> FEBRUARY 2011**

## **Exploitation of Aboriginal workers under SIHIP: Campaigners stand up to Macklin**

The Intervention Rollback Action Group in Alice Springs will today deliver a letter to Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin from Aboriginal workers who say they have been exploited under SIHIP.

The letter will be delivered during the opening of a new temporary accommodation facility in Alice Springs. It demands Minister Macklin organise back-pay for all work done on renovation programs, bring all houses up to public housing standards, provide funding for new houses in all remote communities and restore housing to Aboriginal community control.

Indigenous Employment Minister Mark Arbib claimed during Senate Estimates in November that all work done on SIHIP by Aboriginal workers is paid at award rates and denied that workers were paid on the 'BasicsCard'.

But workers from Amoonguna near Alice Springs say they were kept on the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) during work on SIHIP renovations from June - October last year. Throughout this period they received Centrelink pay, half of which was on their 'BasicsCard' and only intermittent 'top-up' pay.

Payslips from the period prove that, despite some workers putting in more than up to 25 hours per week, no more than 7.5 hours per week was ever paid in cash by CDEP provider Community Enterprises Australia (CEA).

"SIHIP has been a cash-cow for big construction firms and 'training' organisations while Aboriginal people are kept in poverty and abysmal housing conditions. Recent reports show that \$23,000 was paid to a student undertaking 'work experience' with a SIHIP contractor and a lead SIHIP executive was paid \$800,000. Meanwhile, Aboriginal construction workers from Amoonguna have been working for the BasicsCard", said Paddy Gibson from the Intervention Rollback Action Group.

"The claims of Minister Mark Arbib have been proved untrue. Minister Macklin needs to immediately guarantee these workers that they will be back paid for every hour of work done."

"On our recent trip to Santa Teresa we found houses in worse condition after SIHIP 'renovations' than before them. Tiles had been ripped off kitchen and bedroom floors and cooling systems removed without explanation. Rents had increased sometimes more than 300 per cent. Like in the vast majority of communities, no new housing will be built and some people are living 30 to a house."

"The SIHIP rort must end and a public investment program under Aboriginal community control must start immediately to provide employment and proper housing in all communities", concluded Mr Gibson.

Barbara Shaw from Mt Nancy town camp today made the following statement:

"It is disgusting how **Aboriginal people** living at Amoonguna worked for SIHIP and weren't even paid properly. They should be back paid from day one when they started with SIHIP under CEA and New Futures Alliance.

"I really believe Minister Macklin should go out and see the conditions - people are still living in overcrowded houses that weren't fixed up except for a coat of paint. The houses are not up to the standards of Territory housing. This is happening everywhere, most communities that we have visited in the last three years have been the same. There is lack of work, resources, services and housing. The Minister should live in one of our homes in a remote community and work for BasicsCard for even one fortnight to see how hard it is living in a house with no cooling system, overcrowding and having to travel in to town for food every fortnight. See how well she sleeps at night.

"The government is not reinstating the Racial Discrimination Act, just by putting everyone receiving **Centrelink** on income management, it will still be discriminatory against a class of people, the majority of whom will be Aboriginal or Islander. What they should be doing is focussing on social services and paying people properly with wages like every other worker around **Australia**," Ms Shaw concluded.

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