



MEDIA RELEASE

10 March 2015

Young people pay the price in Indigenous funding cuts

Fixing dire Indigenous disadvantage was one of Tony Abbott's personal priorities in his pre-election promises.

Last week the Prime Minister's Indigenous vision to close the gap became blurrier as Barkly Regional Council (BCR) had jobs slashed across its youth, workplace and environmental programs under the Federal Government's Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) funding.

Barkly Regional Council provides services across the second largest local government region in Australia to predominantly Aboriginal residents who directly rely on council at the coalface.

Critical to this success is the workforce, a scarce resource already, which builds bridges to develop indigenous capacity, employment in the workplace and health and wellbeing.

"Our youth development has been completely shattered," says BRC President Barb Shaw. "Twenty-seven Aboriginal jobs are now on the line. What will this do for the 500 kids across the region, aged from 5 – 15, that use our services everyday? Who will help them if we go?"

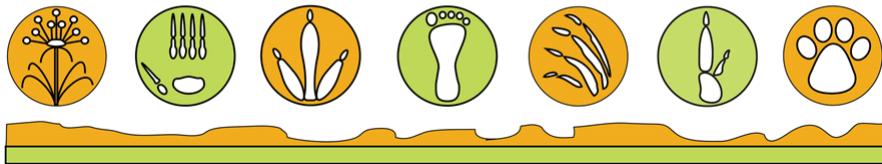
Following the Abbott Government's election 18 months ago, Mr Abbott drafted the Indigenous Affairs portfolio into the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and under his control.

He announced new targets to close the gap, offering five main pillars, the key three pillars being: getting to work, getting children to school and making communities safe.

"We know the reality of creating meaningful Indigenous employment," said President Shaw. "Last year Council delivered a successful Language, Literacy and Numeracy pilot project to help develop speaking, reading, writing and basic maths skills for council staff in one of the region's remote communities.

"No funding in this area now means we cannot roll the project out across our other communities and that literacy and numeracy training support, which is fundamental to

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improving the chances of Indigenous workers in the region getting and keeping a job, has been cut off at the knees.”

Last week, Canberra finally announced the number of organisations set to share \$860 million in grants under the new IAS funding and application process.

Barkly Regional Council was notified that through the IAS it will receive 35 per cent less of its previous budget to deliver frontline community services.

Council received funding for Night Patrol, the School Nutrition Program, Elliott Community Radio and Elliott Playgroup, but youth development, workforce development and animal management applications were not supported.

“The Prime Minister said last year, “it is profoundly shocking that innocent people should be held hostage by an armed person claiming political motivation”,” said President Shaw.

“He was of course referring to the Sydney café siege gunman but in light of the funding cuts it appears Mr Abbott, whose government is armed with cash, is holding Aboriginal disadvantage hostage for political gain.”

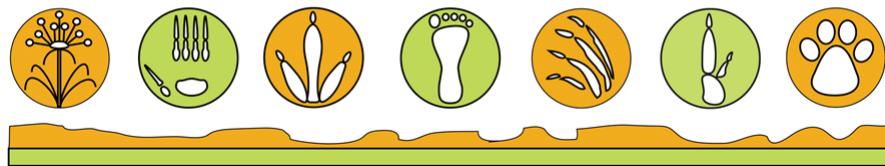
The new IAS strategy, consolidating more than 150 programs, grants and activities, has seen \$534 million cut from Indigenous programs administered by the Prime Minister and Cabinet and Health portfolios.

In Federal Parliament, Labor Senator Nova Peris asked Minister for Indigenous Affairs Nigel Scullion if he stood by his claim the Government's decision to cut \$500m from Indigenous funding would not have an impact on frontline services.

“What is Scullion’s plan?” said President Shaw. “Is this just political recycling? Is the Abbott government just defunding one area because they can’t address the failures in the Remote Jobs and Communities Plan (RJCP)?”

“This should be about real jobs and the meaningful journey to get there, not just slash and burn. Are they trying to close down the bush by stealth?”

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President Shaw said that while the council is very grateful to the Commonwealth Government for receiving a proportion of its funding submission when so many missed out, “it is disappointing that key programs for health and wellbeing have been slashed or have not been funded at all, especially for young people”.

“This funding is critical to retaining jobs on the ground across the region. So any loss in funding has a direct job equivalent loss for the bush and its communities,” she said.

The Barkly Regional Council is heavily reliant on grants for local jobs and this news will impact youth, workplace and environmental management areas, ensuring job numbers and opportunities for Indigenous people go backwards.

Media contact: Ktima Heathcote 08 89620027 or ktima.heathcote@barkly.nt.com.au