

Crikey - *NT intervention leak: a year on, it's a shambles*

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Sophie Black writes:

Crikey has been leaked a weekly progress report on the Northern Territory Intervention almost a year to the day that then Prime Minister John Howard and Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough called a press conference to announce a "National Emergency" in response to the Little Children Are Sacred report.

The document leaked to Crikey, entitled 'Northern Territory Emergency Response Situation Report as at 1500 hrs Wed 14th May 08', paints a picture of an incomplete roll out of the Northern Territory Intervention, an emergency response that Mal Brough recently admitted to ABC Darwin radio was put together in 48 hours. (listen here.)

According to the document, only 63% of children in remote communities have received health checks, and only roughly one third of indigenous adults in remote areas are under income management. And despite Howard's promise that all government funded computers would be audited for pornography, no computer audits have been carried out as yet.

The document details progress on areas such as Child Health Checks (CHC), Schools Nutrition Programmes, Financial Management, Work for the Dole, Pornography, Community Clean Up and Government Business Managers.

As Saturday's anniversary of the Intervention looms, a Northern Territory insider has told Crikey that with the exception of the Northern Territory police and the Commonwealth's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Services (who are working to a two year fully funded program), every other group that come under the intervention umbrella "have been playing it by ear." Given that the Howard government only costed the intervention for one year, groups have been operating with no notion of a timeline for task completion or of when the funding will run out.

According to the document, dated mid May:

- CHCs had been undertaken in 70 of 73 prescribed communities. (note: Crikey understands these health checks were already underway by Aboriginal Medical Services before the intervention and have been in place for a two years...)
- 93% of communities have had CHCs undertaken.
- total coverage rate of children through Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) and Medical Benefits Service (MBS) CHCs is 63%.
- Income management (IM) is in place in 42 communities (of 73) and associated outstations in seven Town Camp regions as at 14 May
- Pornography -- no computer audits have been undertaken so far, despite Howard's promise that all government funded computers would be checked.
- Centrelink have received approximately 40 Ombudsman's complaints, mostly around a lack of understanding concerning the IM (income management) process.
- 5 SA POL will complete their deployments and will be replaced by AFP officers on 28 May.

But while the intervention roll out is lagging in almost every area of implementation, the Northern Territory's economy is looking remarkably robust, partly due to the population influx as a result of the Intervention.

Access Economics predict that the Northern Territory is set to boast the highest economic growth rates over the next five years of any other jurisdiction in the country.

According to an NT News report in April, the Territory's economy is surging ahead of the national rate with an expected 7 per cent growth next year:

The Access Economics March quarter business outlook said much of this growth would come from the Federal Government's spending on the intervention.

NT growth will dwarf the national rate of 3.9 per cent.

The documents leaked to Crikey indicate that as of mid-May there were 810 federal public servants in 72 Aboriginal communities as part of the Intervention, not counting 52 Government Business Managers.

Conservatively, this would come to an annual wages bill of around \$90 million if the public servants were in their home towns, but each of these 810 public servants is also being paid accommodation and travel allowance and quarterly airfares to their home base. These figures also exclude contractors and consultants ranging from Community Employment Brokers, cadastral surveyors and builders.

As a result, the local hotel industry is experiencing record hotel occupancy rates, as whole floors of rooms have been taken up on long term hiring for federal public servants. Restaurant, hire car companies and bottle shops are also enjoying the run off.

Meanwhile, Crikey understands that the federal Finance department has been raising concerns about many aspects of the Intervention that they inherited from the Howard government.

An NT source told Crikey that Lindsay Tanner was raising questions within weeks of his accession to the Finance ministry over the fact that virtually none of the Intervention had been forward funded in the federal budget beyond 30 June this year.

When asked about the cost of the Intervention, then Prime Minister John Howard said: "it will be some tens of millions of dollars. It's not huge but there could be some costs in relation to the extra police."

The source told Crikey that the cost of income management alone is currently running at \$3000 per person per annum — to manage average welfare payments of around \$10,000 per recipient. The documents point out that there are around 10,500 people under income management.

Going by ABS figures, this suggest that approximately only 1/3 of indigenous adults in remote areas are under income management.

But as the NT economy flourishes from the side effects of the Intervention, Crikey understands the job prospects for Aboriginal people have — if anything — declined. According to the documents, over 1700 people have been “transitioned” off CDEP.

Only 667 have been able to be employed in Australian and Territory government funded jobs. The other 1000-odd people, and their dependents, have been moved on to welfare payments.

<http://www.crikey.com.au/Politics/20080618-NT-intervention-documents.html>