

Education is the key

An education future
for Indigenous communities
in the Northern Territory



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The AEU acknowledges the substantial contribution made by Pat Anderson and Rex Wild QC. Their report, *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle "Little Children are Sacred"*, has provided sign posts for the way forward in dealing with the challenges facing the Northern Territory and Indigenous communities. This research project has drawn heavily on the findings and recommendations of their report.

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Foreword

The AEU has a long-standing commitment to Indigenous education. The 2007 annual Federal Conference called on all governments to make the education of Indigenous children a priority.

Since the Howard Government announced its intervention in Indigenous issues in the Northern Territory, the rollout of change has been rapid. While the AEU understands and accepts the basis for the intervention, believing that the protection and safety of children is paramount, we hold reservations about the changes to land tenure, the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act and the quarantining of the welfare payments of all people living in the targeted communities, regardless of their circumstances.

To date the focus of the intervention has been primarily on health and welfare. There have been few announcements about education. However, many of the policies announced will have a massive impact on schools. For example, the rollout of the welfare policy, where payments are to be withheld for non-school attendance, has already stretched existing resources, sometimes beyond reasonable limits.

We are concerned that without a significant injection of resources to the education sector the pressures placed on teachers, teacher aides and principals in schools as outlined in this report, will have negative consequences.

It is not just access to education that we should be concerned about, but also quality. Quality education is affected when classes are overcrowded, infrastructure is inadequate and appropriate supports are not in place to assist both teachers and students, particularly when many students have been disengaged from schooling, and some for a long time.

Indigenous people, like all other Australians, expect their children to have a high quality education that meets their needs. They want it to be provided locally, to be inclusive of their cultures and to prepare them to be happy and productive citizens. Unfortunately, following years of neglect by successive governments but in particular the former CLP government of the Northern Territory, the NT now faces a crisis in education of massive proportions. As the report estimates, there are potentially 7,000 Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory who are missing out on schooling because of a lack of basic infrastructure. This is a national tragedy. Aboriginal children in our country are entitled to the same right as all other Australian children – to access high quality public education in their home communities.

The Federal Government, now that it has taken the step of intervening, must show leadership and back up its actions with resources. Over the years there has been a succession of reports with a multitude of recommendations, each requiring a concerted effort from governments. While there have been some steps forward that have produced positive outcomes, on the whole governments and government systems have failed to respond in any adequate way.

The AEU believes governments at all levels cannot step away from the fact that the provision of a high quality education requires resources. In the case of the Northern Territory, where infrastructure in remote communities is so poor, where the staffing formula actually contributes to non-school attendance, where teachers are over-stretched, where teacher aides and many teachers and principals are employed on short-term contracts, the need for additional resources is paramount.

We call on governments to support and implement the recommendations of this report and provide children in the NT with the same opportunities as all other Australian children. If Aboriginal children are to have the same life chances as all other Australian children, education truly is the key.



Pat Byrne
AEU Federal president



Nadine Williams
AEU NT branch president

Recommendations

The AEU calls on the Federal and Northern Territory governments to work in partnership to ensure that all children in the Northern Territory have access to and participate fully in high quality education. The estimated cost of this provision is an additional \$1.7 billion over five years.

- 1 That the Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments give an ongoing commitment to resourcing the provision of high quality education from two years of preschool for all Indigenous children through to Year 12 and beyond.
- 2 That the Federal Government commit to providing an additional \$1.6 billion to the Northern Territory over five years for the provision of teachers and other staff and support services and for the development of necessary infrastructure such as classrooms and teacher housing.
- 3 That the Northern Territory Government commit to providing at least an additional \$100 million over five years for the provision of support services, the employment and training support of additional Indigenous teachers and the recruitment, training and induction of additional teachers from within and outside the Territory, the professional development of existing staff, the lowering of class sizes, provision of Aboriginal Islander Education Workers (AIEWs) and home liaison officers in every school and the review of curricula and pedagogy.
- 4 That all the education recommendations contained within the *Little Children are Sacred* report be implemented.
- 5 That the resourcing model for Northern Territory preschools and schools be restructured to focus on success, with the initial step to be the staffing of preschools and schools on the basis of enrolments, not on attendance.
- 6 That governments consult and negotiate partnerships with all communities about the sharing of responsibilities, to ensure that all children can participate successfully in a quality education, and the best structure of education and other services to meet community needs.

Executive summary

Lack of education excludes Aboriginal people from confidently and competently participating in either their own culture or mainstream culture, or even the ability to choose when to participate in either culture. A sound education for all Aboriginal children, wherever they live, is now crucial for all of us who live in the Northern Territory.

Little Children are Sacred report

Improving access and participation in high quality education must be a central element in strategies aimed at improving the lives and futures of Territorians.

The Federal Government's recent intervention in NT education has emphasised the need to ensure that Indigenous children of compulsory school age enrol and regularly attend school. This is a limited goal which will not redress the serious disadvantages that Indigenous children and communities currently face. Indigenous children in the Territory should have access to the same educational opportunities as children in the rest of the country.

It is estimated that as many as 7,500 Indigenous children in the NT do not attend school and preschool. In most cases, the teachers, classrooms, chairs and desks simply do not exist to accommodate them. Already, a number of NT schools are facing heavy pressure as a result of a recent surge in enrolments, not restricted to the compulsory years of schooling.

The AEU believes that a broader perspective is necessary. It is time to ensure that all Indigenous children and young people aged 3 to 17 participate fully in schooling, including two years of preschool education, through to Year 12 and beyond. Education enables children to build better futures for themselves, their families and their communities; to find jobs; have successful careers; and to participate actively in their communities and in society.

Years of neglect

Education outside the NT's major urban areas is still showing the effects of many years of neglect under the previous CLP Government. Since 2001, the NT Government has engaged in significant reforms that have seen an improvement in both education access and outcomes for Indigenous students.

Despite the improvements, many Indigenous children are not enrolled in school at all and children who are enrolled attend on average 60 per cent of the time. Indigenous student outcomes remain lower than those of other Territorians. As the *Little Children are Sacred* report made clear, the reasons are complex and reveal failures on the part of families and communities to engage in education. The education system and governments have also failed to engage fully with the needs and expectations of Indigenous students. In addition, there are continuing issues surrounding the systemic support for Indigenous languages, culture and community involvement that must be addressed.

Lack of adequate resources remains the critical factor. Resource commitments to good initiatives have been modest and would have led to far greater change with more substantive funding and resource input. Some essential services have been reduced since 1996 and not restored. Some fundamental resource issues have not been addressed at all.

The continued use of attendance figures rather than enrolments as the basis of staffing schools is a major impediment to increasing school participation. The current staffing and resourcing model is not so much designed to enable schools to cope but rather, seems more designed to ensure they fail at the objective of enrolling and engaging all children in the community. The continued lack of preschool education in many communities is also a major concern, since its absence means that children begin school already at a disadvantage.

Accounting for all

Whether or not the Northern Territory Government could or should have given more resources, the fact is that the NT alone does not have the capacity to provide all Territorians with the same opportunities and services available to other Australians.

There are no accurate figures on the number of NT children not enrolled in school. On the basis of 2006 Census data, it would seem that some 7,500 children aged 3 to 17 years could be missing out on preschool and school. Provision for these students would require an additional 660 teachers and, with accompanying costs, would require an additional \$99 million per annum.

Indigenous students attend school on average about 60 per cent of the time. If all children were to participate fully, an additional 700 teachers would be required. The costs of full participation would be an estimated additional \$105 million per annum.

Staffing is calculated on a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:10, which is equivalent to that provided for migrant ESL students. Indigenous children who will be enrolling or re-engaging in school will often have poor literacy and numeracy levels in their first language and no use of standard Australian English. Many children will have experienced trauma and abuse, many will have health problems such as hearing loss that will require additional support.

There are a range of additional support costs that would come with full participation. These include provision of additional counsellors, AIEWs and home liaison officers to be employed in every school and assistant teachers for every Indigenous class.

There are also one-off infrastructure costs associated with increased enrolments including additional classrooms and perhaps schools, and teacher housing in remote communities. Indigenous teachers should be provided with access to this housing.

Over five years, the estimated cost of full education provision for all Indigenous children in the Northern Territory is around \$1.7 billion.

The Northern Territory cannot resource the unmet needs alone. As a nation, we have a collective responsibility to ensure that all Australians are provided with equitable access to essential infrastructure and services and with equal opportunities to build better futures for themselves and their families and communities. The Commonwealth Government must ensure that there is long-term follow-up to the current intervention and this requires a substantial funding commitment. With a federal surplus of \$17.3 billion, the Commonwealth has the resources to make this education commitment.

It is the responsibility of families and communities to ensure that their children participate fully in education and the opportunities that it will provide them to build better futures for themselves and their communities. But it is the responsibility of governments to ensure that those opportunities are made available equitably to all Australians. Implementation of this plan for education will require consultation and the building of partnerships with every community.

The vision of universal education will not be achieved overnight. But a beginning must be made and the resources committed for the longer-term objectives of achieving full and successful participation in education for all Indigenous children and young people in the Northern Territory.

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Introduction

The AEU strongly supports measures to protect children in Indigenous communities and acknowledges the need for urgent action to address violence in those communities. The effects of child abuse potentially damage every aspect of a child's future as an individual, a family member and a citizen. We have a responsibility to protect children from harm and to provide them with the best possible opportunities to live their lives to the fullest, and to be happy, safe and nurtured. The AEU supports the recommendations of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, which stressed the need for both urgent and long-term action to address the issues raised in the report.

However, the AEU, together with the ACTU, rejects the Federal Government's arguments that suspension of the *Racial Discrimination Act*, changes to the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* and the elimination of the permit system have any relationship to genuine measures to protect children. The AEU shares the concern and sorrow of many Aboriginal elders and organisations and of the NT Government in response to some aspects of the current intervention by the Federal Government in the Northern Territory. The compulsory acquisition of Aboriginal land for five years and the possibility of the cancellation of leases for town camps with a view to taking control of the camps, together with the abolition of the permit system for access to Aboriginal land, are actions that have created unnecessary anger, fear and division. The central premise of the *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle* "Little Children are Sacred" report,¹ which the Federal Government has used as the reason for its intervention in the Northern Territory, is that it is critically important that governments commit to genuine consultation with Aboriginal people in designing initiatives for Aboriginal communities.

The co-chair of the Board of Inquiry, Patricia Anderson said:

'Aboriginal families and Aboriginal people do want to own this problem, they want to be part of solving it. They want it fixed, they are sick and tired of their communities being sick', she said.

[But] if we do this top down as proposed, there's a danger of it being seen as a cynical exercise.

'There's a real opportunity here to once and for all do something... We need extraordinary interventions but not at the risk of infringing our fundamental human rights.'

Ms Anderson said the opportunity presented by the report had been lost.² The current federal approach is being met with opposition and scepticism by Aboriginal organisations, the union movement and human rights advocates. It is also creating division in remote communities.

At the same time, there is widespread recognition and acceptance that the issues raised by the *Little Children are Sacred* report – and the many reports that have preceded it – are a national responsibility and must be addressed.

We live in circumstances that are not of our making and without the kind of support that other people in Australia have had for many years... Many of us do not drink or take drugs, and we protect, respect, love and care for our children, our families and our cultural traditions... So I want to say that we do honestly welcome any real help with the problems created by our contact with non-Indigenous society, and by past failures to fund and deliver basic services, but we will not be treated as though we have no rights in our own land or lives.

Banduk Marika, community leader and artist, Yirrkala

The recommendations in the *Little Children are Sacred* report recognise the need for a broad range of policy and resource interventions, a determined and coordinated effort and a long-term outlook of at least 15 years to make some inroads into the crisis of 'historical, present and continuing social dysfunction'³.

There is hope that the current intervention by the Federal Government is based on a genuine long-term commitment. But the fear is that this too will dissipate, as so many ventures have in the past, before the underlying issues are addressed and real progress can be made. This would leave more despair, anger and hopelessness in its wake and must not be allowed to happen.

¹ Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse 2007, *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle* "Little Children are Sacred"

² AAP 10 August 2007 and *The Australian*, 11 August 2007, cited in the Additional Comments by the Australian Labor Party in the Senate and Legal Constitutional Affairs Committee *Report of the Inquiry into the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Bill 2007 & Related Bills*. (Senate Inquiry)

³ *Little Children are Sacred* op. cit.

There is a strong case for national intervention. The crisis of poverty and despair in many Indigenous communities in the NT, and the violence, abuse and neglect described in the *Little Children are Sacred* report, which stem from that basic condition, are longstanding issues. Indigenous peoples are being blamed for the current situation and yet their calls for support and resources to assist communities address their problems, for a fair share of the nation's resources, the countless reports on what needs to be done, and the reality of poverty and lack of opportunity, too often have been ignored.

Addressing these issues is a responsibility not only for Indigenous communities, but for all of us. As a nation, we have a responsibility to ensure that all Australians are provided with equitable access to essential infrastructure and services and with equal opportunities to build better futures for themselves and their families.

The Federal Government's recent intervention has failed to recognise the efforts of many Indigenous communities to address problems and to deliver significant social and economic community programs. Not only is there evidence of unnecessary duplication of services (such as health checks on children who have recently had a health check and may be on waiting lists for further treatment) but more significantly there is concern that existing services and programs may be undermined as a result of the intervention.

The AEU calls on the Federal Government to recognise the governance and legal rights of Traditional Owners and the Land Councils and to urgently commence consultations with Aboriginal communities to reach agreement about the way forward.

The AEU supports the principles put forward by the Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the Northern Territory for the planning and implementation of any measures that respond to the *Little Children are Sacred* report. These are:

- Relationships with Aboriginal communities must be built on trust and mutual respect. All initiatives must be negotiated with the relevant communities.
- Cultural awareness and appropriateness.
- Actions should draw from and strengthen governance and community capacity.
- Build on the knowledge base already there in communities and in government.
- Flexibility and responsiveness to local needs rather than 'one-size-fits-all' approach.
- Aboriginal communities are entitled to receive the same benefits and services and their children the same protections that are available to other Australians.⁴

⁴ Submission of the Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the Northern Territory to the Senate Inquiry, August 2007

This paper begins to address the issues that relate to the provision of high quality education for all children in the Northern Territory. These issues must continue to be addressed if all Territory children are to be provided with the opportunity to lead fulfilled and productive lives. The Federal Government's legislation aims, through the coercive quarantining of welfare payments, to ensure that all children enrol in and attend school. The AEU agrees with the objective of ensuring all children are provided with access to quality education, wherever they live. That objective should extend beyond the compulsory years of school, from early years development programs such as play groups, to preschool education, to the completion of Year 12 and beyond. The Northern Territory education system will need a massive injection of funds and other resources to enable this objective to be realised.

As *Little Children are Sacred* said, 'education remains the key factor in all future relationships between Territorians'. The report argues that:

Much work needs to be done, but a lot of work has already been done and a lot of people, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, are very knowledgeable about this and what needs to be done.⁵

The development of education partnership contracts between communities and the NT Government, which outline agreed priorities and the responsibilities of all partners, provides a useful model of how to move forward together. The Yirrkala Remote Learning Partnership is the first to be signed in the Northern Territory. The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) has endorsed the concept of formalised school and community educational partnerships.⁶

The *Little Children are Sacred* report goes on to say that in conjunction with the need to provide education and persuade parents to take responsibility, it is necessary to provide housing and other infrastructure and employment, and to address social problems and disempowerment. The issues raised are linked and cannot be addressed in isolation. The AEU supports this view strongly. Provision of quality and equitable education opportunities requires, for example, access to housing, for communities and local and visiting teachers; access to health services; and access to employment beyond schooling. At its most basic, it requires access to the quality schooling that all Australian citizens should have – preschool, primary, secondary and vocational education.

Ensuring that all children participate in education is not solely the responsibility of parents and families. Governments have a responsibility to provide access; providers have a responsibility to ensure that education is of the highest quality, is respectful of children's lives, languages and cultures, and engages them with learning and in the development of their own future. The education of our children is everybody's business.

Governments have acknowledged their responsibility. In 1989, all federal, state and territory governments endorsed the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, which set 21 national goals relating to: the involvement of Aboriginal people in education decision-making; equality of access to educational services; equity of educational participation; and equitable and appropriate educational outcomes. Eighteen years on, it is time to ensure that education in the Northern Territory – and indeed, across Australia – meets those goals.⁷

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ MCEETYA, Report of 20th meeting, 6 July 2006

⁷ MCEETYA, National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996–2002, www.mceetya.edu.au

Federal intervention in education

Seventy three communities, each with a population of greater than 100, are the initial focus of the federal intervention. In total there are 81 Indigenous communities with populations of more than 100 in the Northern Territory, totalling an estimated usual population of 32,000 people. An additional 560 communities with populations of less than 100 and an estimated usual total population of nearly 10,000 are not mentioned in the emergency response.⁸ Of the targeted communities, 67 have schools.

The federal legislation includes 'welfare reform measures' that introduce an income management regime for individuals. The Federal Government says these measures are to help enforce the protection of children and to ensure that children enrol in and attend school. The intention is to impose penalties after parents have been advised and given seven days to produce evidence of enrolment and 'satisfactory attendance'. The government has said that the measures will be offered to state and territory governments across Australia.

In the Northern Territory, 50 per cent of the income support and family assistance payments of every individual in the prescribed areas will be income-managed for an initial period of 12 months, irrespective of individual circumstances. The measures will continue to apply to individuals who move out of these areas. The rollout of these measures had already commenced in Central Australian prescribed communities in the first week of September 2007. The school enrolment and attendance provisions, which may lead to income management of between 50 and 100 per cent of a person's welfare payments will commence 'as soon as possible in the Northern Territory to support the government's emergency response.'⁹

Yirrkala school does not have enough desks now for our teachers. We do not have enough desks or chairs for extra children. Quarantining welfare payments will not make our children go to school. We want our children to go to school. We want our children to learn... We Yolgnu parents desperately want our children to grow up healthy and well educated. We expect the government to treat us with respect. That is the only way: to listen to us, to talk with us and work with us. That has not happened with this legislation. This legislation feels like a return to the old protection system under which the government decided everything about our lives. That did not work.

Raymattja Marika, Yirrkala Elder, Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the Northern Territory – verbal submission to Senate Inquiry

⁸ Altman J., 2007, "National Emergency" and Land Rights Reform: Separating Fact from Fiction, An assessment of the proposed amendments to the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*, Briefing Paper for Oxfam Australia

⁹ Minister Brough, Second Reading Speech, Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Welfare Payment Reform) Bill 2007, House of Representatives Hansard 7 August 2007

The stated intent is to ensure that all children in the Northern Territory of compulsory school age enrol in and attend school. This will place the education system under enormous and unmanageable pressure if all children and young people not enrolled or fully engaged in school do attend. Whether or not this will occur to that extent is yet to be seen. A Senate Inquiry (the Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee inquiry on the NT National Emergency Response Legislation) heard evidence that the quarantining of welfare payments was trialled in Halls Creek and was 'spectacularly unsuccessful', and did not improve school attendance.¹⁰ However, there have already been some significant increases in enrolment and attendance in a number of Northern Territory schools, and yet there is no federal or NT government relief in sight.

I think the government have to be realistic about some of the things they are putting forward in terms of education, health and housing. If tomorrow every Aboriginal kid in the Northern Territory turns up at school – you have probably already heard this – there are not enough classrooms, there are not enough desks, there are not enough chairs and there is nowhere near the amount of teachers that are needed. It is not going to happen. You have all of these problems. So, to start quarantining people's money up front and removing the CDEP – you are going to put this log jam into place. This needs to be done properly. We are not saying 'Don't do it'; we are saying that it needs to be done properly.

David Ross, Director, Central Land Council – verbal submission to Senate Inquiry

As a submission to the Senate Inquiry points out, these measures take responsibility away from parents and it is as yet unclear how the plan will deal with the non-nuclear nature of Indigenous families and their high mobility.¹¹ The Senate Inquiry's report noted that it believed there should be further clarification of the definition of 'unsatisfactory school attendance'. It is unclear who will be responsible for collecting the data. Initial reports indicate that Australian Government business managers will have access to school rolls to obtain documentary evidence of enrolment and attendance. In at least one community, teachers are being asked to identify students by age and family. Perceptions that teachers are involved in the quarantining of people's pensions would be likely to have serious effects on the relationship between the school and the community.

The introduction of administrators into communities is directly related to the business management (Section 5) of the NT Emergency Response legislation. It specifies the control over all funding arrangements and infrastructure in the prescribed communities. In some places it appears that NT government housing is being taken over to house federal intervention personnel, leading to suspension or disruption of education services. On Elcho Island, for example, accommodation for visiting teachers has been taken over for the army. Teachers have been informed that either their visits must be suspended or the teachers will have to sleep on a floor. In another community, teachers have been told by the new federal administrator that they are now under his management and that includes their housing. Such additional pressures, particularly when coupled with a difficult situation made more so by a failure to resource the enrolment increases, may well lead to resignations that the education system cannot afford.

¹⁰ e.g. O. Havnen, Coordinator, Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the Northern Territory, and ACROSS, verbal submissions to Senate Inquiry, August 2007

¹¹ Fogarty B. & Paterson M., *Constructive Engagement: Impacts, Limitations and Possibilities during a National Emergency Intervention*, PIA Consultants, submission to Senate Inquiry, August 2007

Abolition of CDEP

The abolition of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme will have major consequences for Indigenous employment in the education system. This links, too, with the strongly implied direction of no longer servicing many Homeland centres, which will have major resource implications for both those communities and the nearest towns – and for education services.

While the AEU has long campaigned for reform of the CDEP program and, in particular, the transfer of school-based employees into full-time positions and access to associated entitlements, we fear that the sudden abolition of the scheme will have long-term impacts on the already overstretched education system.

Funding ceased for CDEP programs in Darwin in July 2007 when the Federal Government replaced CDEP with Structured Training and Employment Projects (STEP) in urban and major regional centres. At the time, the government said that CDEP would be continued in 'remote locations and regional locations with weaker labour markets'.¹²

However, as part of the Federal Government's emergency response in the Northern Territory, CDEP programs will be abolished from September 2007 on a community-by-community basis. Individuals who are transferred to income support arrangements will be subject to income management.

The government has estimated that about 2,000 of the 8,000 people currently in CDEP positions will be assisted into 'real work'. Others will be provided with training and/or access to mainstream employment programs.¹

The Northern Territory Government has opposed the wholesale changes, arguing that it will cause more uncertainty for people in the bush and create increased urban drift and lead to further social problems. And it will lead to an 18 per cent pay cut for already financially disadvantaged people. In addition, it will remove \$20 million in CDEP running costs from remote communities, which provides for the maintenance of essential services in large communities and Homeland centres and the employment of local people. CDEP has ensured important jobs such as night patrol, aged care and early childhood care are filled in remote areas.¹³

In reality, people will be moved from work to welfare unless these jobs become fully funded by government.

As Professor Jon Altman, Director of the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University informed the Senate Inquiry:

*The abolition of CDEP will place many community enterprises, including community stores and currently viable businesses, in immediate financial jeopardy. It will see the collapse of outstation resource agencies and the possible influx of up to 10,000 residents of 560 outstations into already overcrowded townships.*¹⁴

Similar concerns were expressed by Fogarty and Paterson in their submission to the inquiry about the likely impacts on the Maningrida region. They noted that in attempting to mitigate 'historical underinvestment by the state, particularly in housing, health and education', Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation (BAC) had used a mix of grant programs, CDEP and locally generated income to create a successful development base. There are 71 'government positions' subsidised by CDEP in human services alone. Without cross-subsidisation by CDEP, they suggest costs to both the NT and Australian governments on current numbers of positions will double. The cost of transferring cross-subsidised employment for Maningrida alone is estimated at \$1.4 million, without considering on-costs and housing.

They suggest, too, that the range of interventions and the abolition of CDEP may lead to the depopulation of the outstations, which could lead to another 600 extra people requiring accommodation in Maningrida, over and above the existing waiting list. Moreover, such an influx would also affect the school, Maningrida CEC, which has, according to the authors, the classroom capacity to service 450 students and already had 497 students on the roll in the first semester of this year – with an additional, substantial increase in enrolments this term that has reportedly risen to a total of 620 enrolled.

They note also that early indications of increases in school attendance will mean 'an exponential need for Aboriginal assistant teachers and associated liaison staff will be critical'.¹⁵

¹² DEWR, 2006, 'Indigenous Potential meets Economic Opportunity', Discussion paper, www.workplace.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/D61B8DCB-A036-423F-9511-299E83F22752/0/CDEPPaperdiscussionwebfinal.pdf

¹³ E. McAdam, Minister Assisting the Chief Minister on Indigenous Affairs, 'NT Govt opposes CDEP Changes', Media Release, 23 July 2007.

¹⁴ Verbal submission to the Senate Inquiry, August 2007

¹⁵ Fogarty & Paterson op. cit.

Impact of loss of CDEP on education

The abolition of CDEP will have a major effect on the education system. Firstly, enormous pressure will be placed on existing education institutions if the federal intervention does force people in small communities – Homeland centres/outstations – to move into larger communities or townships in order to meet the requirements of the new system.

Secondly, there are many CDEP workers in remote and very remote schools in the Northern Territory, including many assistant teachers partly funded through CDEP.

The Local Government Association of the Northern Territory (LGANT) undertook an audit of employment opportunities in 52 remote Indigenous communities in 2006. At least 27 of the communities included in this audit are prescribed areas under the federal emergency measures. LGANT reported that in the 52 communities, 5,567 CDEP participants were identified. Of these, 1,425 were in receipt of 'top-up' – that is, received extra money for work over the base CDEP hours of 16 hours per week. In these 52 communities, there were 223 CDEP school placements reported, of which 93 received 'top-up'. A high proportion of Indigenous people participating in CDEP programs work as teacher's assistants.¹⁶

No accurate figures are available on the total number of Indigenous people working in Territory schools through CDEP, with or without 'top-up' payments. An estimate of 500–600 is considered reasonable, based on the number reported by LGANT in 52 communities. Are schools to have their staffing reduced by this amount – or will the federal and territory governments accept responsibility for funding the work that will no longer be provided through CDEP payments? The biggest impact will be on the smaller schools in very remote areas of the Territory where employment by Group School Management Councils has relied heavily on CDEP, thereby cutting costs to the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET). DEET has only identified 120 positions in schools as eligible to be transitioned to government employment.

The Federal Minister has indicated that the move from CDEP to the stated employment, training and mainstream employment services will result in savings of \$76.3 million, which needs to be offset against the appropriations for the intervention.¹⁷

The Dissenting Report by the Australian Greens in the Report of the Senate Inquiry noted that abolition of CDEP will reduce Australian government costs by \$76 million, with only \$46.9 million appropriated for additional income support. The Greens commented that this 'effectively represents \$30 million that is being taken out of Aboriginal communities'.¹⁸

¹⁶ Local Government Association of the Northern Territory, 2006, *Audit of Employment Opportunities in Remote Communities in the Northern Territory August 2006*, LGANT/Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Australian Government

¹⁷ Second reading speech, Appropriation (Northern Territory National Emergency Response) Bill (No. 1) 2007–2008, Hansard 7 August 2007

¹⁸ Dissenting Report by the Australian Greens, Report of the Senate Committee Inquiry, cites Hansard p.6 and Answer to Question on Notice No. 59

The Northern Territory education system

Overview

There is a striking contrast between the demography of the Northern Territory and Australia as a whole.

The Northern Territory has a young and growing population that is widely dispersed across a vast region. Aboriginal people make up 30 per cent of the Territory's population and 38 per cent of the Aboriginal population children under 15 years old. Seventy two per cent of the Territory's Aboriginal population lives on Aboriginal land outside major towns.²⁰

There were a total of 38,756 full-time and part-time school students in the Territory in 2006 in 152 government schools, 51 Homeland learning centres and 36 non-government schools. These students were taught by 1,807 primary and 1,169 secondary teachers. The participation rate of 15-year-olds in the NT was 80.0 per cent, compared with an Australian average of 94.5 per cent.²¹

In 2005, Indigenous students were 41.2 per cent of all students in NT government schools, and 28.3 per cent of students enrolled in NT non-government schools, compared with 5.2 per cent and 1.6 per cent respectively across Australia. A high proportion of Indigenous students have English as a second, third or fourth language. In many remote Indigenous communities, the school and the health centre are the only places where standard Australian English is spoken.

Proportions of NT and Australian population by selected demographic characteristics 2001 Census:¹⁹

	Northern Territory	Australia
Indigenous	29.9%	2.4%
Low fluency English	6.9%	3.0%
Urban areas	43.6%	70.2%
Proportion of Aboriginal population in remote regions	19.9%	6.7%
Proportion of Aboriginal population in very remote regions	55.3%	19.4%
0-4 years old	8.6%	6.6%
5-14 years old	17.3%	14.2%

In addition, the NT has a far higher rate of students with disabilities enrolled in NT government schools and a lower proportion of students in Years 11 and 12 than elsewhere in Australia. Support for students with a specific disability has been reduced in 2007, with more than 500 students across the Territory now without inclusion support assistants. Most students with special needs in very remote schools do not have any one-to-one assistance.

While 1.5 per cent of schools across Australia are in remote areas, this is true for 22.0 per cent of NT schools; moreover, an additional 23.2 per cent of NT schools are in very remote areas, compared with 0.9 per cent Australia-wide. A total of 119 schools and 70 per cent of Indigenous students are located outside Darwin and Alice Springs. While 48.9 per cent of NT government primary schools have fewer than 100 pupils, this is true for 30.3 per cent of primary schools across Australia.²² All of these elements contribute to a far higher level of funding needs than is the case in other jurisdictions.

The AEU NT Branch supports the concept proposed by *Little Children are Sacred*, for local negotiation over school terms that cater for the cultural needs of children, families and Community Elders. Differing term arrangements to ensure maximum participation in schooling while recognising cultural activities and 'business time' is vital to the provision of quality education. Inflexible school term dates have meant high absentee rates and difficulty in re-engaging in school programs, especially for secondary students.

¹⁹ Commonwealth Grants Commission 2007, *Relative Fiscal Capacities of the States 2007*, Commonwealth of Australia

²⁰ A snapshot of the Northern Territory, Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the Northern Territory, www.oxfam.org.au/campaigns/indigenousdocs/NT-snapshot.pdf

²¹ ABS 2007, 4221.0, *Schools 2006*

²² Review of Government Service Provision 2007, Report on Government Service 2007, and Indigenous Compendium, Productivity Commission, and DEET website, www.deet.nt.gov.au/education/indigenous_education

Education reform

Education outside of the major urban areas is still showing the effects of many years of neglect. As the Member for Lingiari, Warren Snowden, recently pointed out, 'the previous CLP Government that had been in power since 1978, had consciously taken policy decisions not to extend secondary services to remote communities; indeed, it had closed residential colleges specifically provided for Aboriginal students'. Not only was secondary education not available in remote areas but opportunities to move to urban areas in order to study were thus minimised. Bilingual education programs were scrapped in 1999.²³

Preschool education received little support outside major urban areas. There was little evidence of infrastructure funding to improve education facilities in remote communities and many schools continue to operate within inadequate and unmaintained buildings.

Since 2001, the NT Government has engaged in significant reform that has seen an improvement in both education access and outcomes for Indigenous students. In brief, these include:

- the development of an Indigenous Education Strategic Plan, now in its second iteration, for 2006–09;
- the rollout of preschool education to some communities via mobile preschools, providing access to more than 250 children and a changed age of entry that will see all children have a full transition year;
- the Building Better Schools program – the restructure of secondary schooling into middle (Years 7–9) and senior (Years 10–12) schools (BBS is both a vehicle for NT Government reforms and a series of connected program initiatives);
- increased access to secondary schooling in remote communities, the provision of 20 specialist secondary teachers, and four Collaborative Trial Sites in groups of schools;
- provision of 100 over-establishment teachers across the NT over five years (although enrolment growth has prevented this goal being fully achieved);
- work (although slow) on a new, more transparent and equitable staffing allocation formula able to be applied within existing or set resources;
- restructuring of distance learning programs into the NT Distance Learning Service in 2007 to improve access for remote Indigenous students, a Virtual Classroom and rollout of Interactive Distance Learning;
- provision of 20 wellbeing counsellors to secondary schools;
- provision of breakfast programs for more than 650 children in seven communities;
- implementation of literacy and numeracy programs, such as the joint Commonwealth-NT Accelerated Literacy Program, now in up to 70 schools;
- Training for Remote Youth and Vocational Education and Training in Schools programs provided in some areas;
- development of the first of 15 Regional Learning Partnership contracts in larger remote townships to facilitate closer relationships between school and community;
- Indigenous scholarships for four years teacher training, with 37 awarded in 2007;
- upgrade of school infrastructure for some remote communities.²⁴

²³ Snowden W., 'It's not just *what* we do, but *how* we do it', Speech to the Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Knowledge Conference, University of Technology Sydney, 12 July 2007

²⁴ Information taken largely from NT Budget Papers; Snowden W. op. cit.; NT DEET Indigenous Education Strategic Plan; NT DEET website, NT Government, *Agenda for Action, a Whole of Government Approach to Indigenous Affairs in the Northern Territory, 2005–2009*

The Northern Territory Government has adopted both a whole of government *Agenda for Action* and the specific *Indigenous Education Strategic Plan*, which acknowledges the challenges yet to be overcome in ensuring provision of quality and equitable education opportunities for Indigenous children across the Territory. Efforts are being made to improve access to, and the relevance and quality of, all sectors of education, from preschool through to senior secondary and vocational education and training. This is a broader – and more appropriate – framework than the current Federal Government’s intervention, which has a limited focus on the compulsory schooling years.

Government believes that the reach of government services must be extended beyond the major urban areas of Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Nhulunbuy and Darwin. The major communities are an important part of the development of a strongly decentralised Territory. To that end, I will be acting to develop and grow the education and training services available in each of these places. For the most part, these communities have schools that are described now as Community Education Centres, and it is these centres that will receive our fullest attention. In all, there are 15 government Community Education Centres in the Territory. These are: Alekarenge, Angurugu, Borroloola, Gapuwiyak, Gunbalanya, Kalkarindji, Lajamanu, Maningrida, Milingimbi, Ramingining, Ngukurr, Shepherdson College, Numbulwar, Yirrkala and Yuendumu. Over the next four years, we will work to offer effective education from preschool through to senior secondary in each of these centres, with students able to progress from there to tertiary or vocational education and training opportunities, or directly to employment.²⁵

An important initiative in this process is the development of Remote Learning Partnerships, aimed at empowering communities and working together to achieve improved educational outcomes. The first such agreement was signed between the Yambirra Schools Council of Yirrkala and the NT Government in August 2007 at the Garma Festival. The agreement provides for the creation of a Youth Development Unit, aimed at achieving better coordination across service organisations of young people at risk and creating employment and training pathways. It focuses on building Indigenous governance into the governance of schools, improving attendance and achievement at school, supporting parents and children in the early childhood years and supporting adult education and employment. While there are still elements to be finalised in relation to issues such as staffing and resourcing, this is a significant and positive step and, it is hoped, provides a model for the development of community-government partnerships in other communities. Consultations have now begun in other places.²⁶

The foundation for this project was laid three years ago by the old people... this partnership is one of the wisest things that ever happened. It will help our children to become strong leaders for the future. It’s time to have a unified voice, to speak out with one voice, one mind.

Wali Wunungmurra, Chairperson, Yambirra Schools Council of Yirrkala.

The initiatives implemented by the NT Government have seen significant – if sometimes small – improvements on a wide range of issues. In particular, the rollout of secondary education into remote communities is a critical step in delivering education to Indigenous Territorians.

But given the extent of the problems arising from years of neglect and inactivity, what still needs to be done is overwhelming.

While it is not appropriate for this report to attempt to analyse the various NT Government initiatives in any detail, the following discussion attempts a snapshot of some of the issues currently facing the education system.

²⁵ Ministerial Statement – Indigenous Education and Training, Tenth Assembly, First Session, 16/8/2005

²⁶ DEET, Remote Learning Partnerships Newsletter, ‘Creating Mutual Ways’, September 2007, Edition 2

Education challenges

Access and participation

The stark reality is that it was only four years ago that the first Aboriginal students from a remote community attained their Northern Territory Certificate of Education (NTCE) in their home community. In 2005, 75 Indigenous students attained their NTCE, including 45 from remote and very remote locations. The numbers may be small but the rate of growth is significant. There have been significant improvements in the retention of Indigenous students from Year 8 to Year 10 and to Year 12 over the last five years or so. Yet it is also true that while Indigenous students comprised 40 per cent of the whole secondary student population in 2005, only 12 per cent of the students who completed their NTCE were Indigenous (13.5 per cent in 2006).²⁷ The Combined Aboriginal Organisations have estimated that 43 per cent of Indigenous secondary students are registered as 'ungraded' students – secondary-aged students who have not achieved Year 7 primary school education.²⁸

There has been an improvement in education outcomes for Indigenous students as shown by the increased number of Indigenous students achieving reading and numeracy benchmark levels at Years 3, 5 and 7. Even if the degree of improvement across the indicators and year levels varies, it is generally true that the greatest improvement has been demonstrated by students from very remote settings.²⁹ Yet it is also true that education outcomes for the NT are far lower than in other jurisdictions and lower for Indigenous than non-Indigenous students. For example, in 2006, fewer than 40 per cent of Indigenous students achieved the Year 3 reading benchmark, compared with 87 per cent of non-Indigenous students.³⁰

Yet as has been made clear, there are still large numbers of Indigenous students who are not enrolled at all, with estimates ranging from 2,000 students of compulsory age³¹ to more than 3,500 of secondary age³², to as many as 5,000 potential students under the age of 18 in remote areas who have no access to secondary or vocational education services.³³ There are communities that still do not have access to schooling, although no actual assessment of these areas or their extent has been published. In addition, while attendance rates vary across communities, enrolled Indigenous students have an attendance rate of 60 per cent on average.

It needs to be said, too, that the problems of low enrolment, attendance, poor outcomes and the need to make efforts to re-engage young people who have left the education system are not exclusive to small, very remote communities. While some of the circumstances may differ, schools in Alice Springs and other towns also struggle with how best to meet these challenges.

We are utterly convinced that education (that properly addresses the needs of the local community) provides the path to success. We have been dismayed at the miserable school attendance rates for Aboriginal children and the apparent complacency here (and elsewhere in Australia) with that situation.

Little Children are Sacred p.18

As *Little Children are Sacred* points out, the reasons for this situation are complex. While a failure to engage on the part of families and communities is certainly a key factor, the report also blames the education system, for failing to fully understand and meet the needs and expectations of Indigenous children and communities, as well as the complex interlinking of educational motivation and opportunity with wider economic and social circumstances.

The issues related to the current and future levels of participation are a central element in assessing the costs of the federal intervention and are addressed further below.

²⁷ See, for example, NT DEET Indigenous Education Strategic Plan, 2006–09

²⁸ A snapshot of the Northern Territory, Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the Northern Territory, op. cit.

²⁹ NT DEET, Indigenous Education Strategic Plan, 2006–2009

³⁰ NT Government, 2007, 'Closing the Gap of Indigenous Disadvantage, A Generational Plan of Action', Education Fact Sheet at www.action.nt.gov.au

³¹ NT Government, 'Welfare Reforms', www.stopabuse.nt.gov.au

³² CDU and NT DEET, Report on Future Directions for Secondary Education in the Northern Territory

³³ Snowden W., 2007, op. cit.

Language, culture and inclusive curriculum

The education matters raised first by the *Little Children are Sacred* report relate to language and culture. The report argues that teaching in English alone develops ‘a failure syndrome’ for many students – not understanding concepts, not remembering what was taught in what is, after all, a foreign language.

*A strong cohort of bilingual and trilingual teachers trained in cross-cultural sensitivities is essential and of prime importance for the NT education system. To do anything less will see people in the Territory continue to mis-communicate and result in further dislocation.*³⁴

A Ministerial Statement in August 2005 announced that bilingual education was ‘back on the agenda’. Given initial evidence of better outcomes, it was to be further evaluated and discussed with communities, to be ‘carefully rolled out’ given its resource-heavy nature.³⁵ Snowden has recently said that there are currently 12 schools, ‘supported by a frail network of three regional linguists to accommodate more than 20 or so active languages; to struggle along with the successor to the bilingual education program that had been scrapped by the former CLP Government.’³⁶

Little Children are Sacred points to the Learning Lessons recommendations that call for Indigenous perceptions and viewpoints to be reflected in the curricula, and suggests that they may not have been systematically implemented. Work on the implementation of a new NT Indigenous Languages and Culture Policy seems to be proceeding slowly, according to *Little Children are Sacred*, although it is supposed to be fully implemented in 2008.

Our community wanted separate classes for young men and women. The principal over-rode that. The boys aren’t coming to school.

Teacher, very remote school

People ask me why I’m taking my class to watch an air traffic controller land a plane, or to other places – fire stations, science centres – where people are doing skilled and interesting work.

I simply reply – ‘and why not’? Kids need to be offered more possible options than learning a trade.

Urban teacher of a group of Indigenous male teenagers with interrupted schooling

³⁴ *Little Children are Sacred* op. cit.

³⁵ Ministerial Statement, Indigenous Education and Training, 24 August 2005, Tenth Assembly 16 August 2005

³⁶ Snowden W., 2007, op. cit.

A range of current initiatives are designed to increase the number of Indigenous teachers but again, the numbers are small. In 2005, there were 61 Indigenous teachers and executive teachers working for the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET).³⁷ There has been some increase since then as a result of scholarship and mentoring programs. There are currently seven Indigenous principals employed in NT government schools.

Little Children are Sacred has urged DEET to examine a range of issues which will make education a more positive and engaging experience for Indigenous children. These issues include pedagogy, consultation with local communities about modifications of the curriculum framework and cross-cultural training for children. The knowledge and experiences that Indigenous children bring to school must be recognised and respected. So too must be the role of their parents and families as the first educators of their children.

Much has been said about specific programs, notably the Clontarf program, which has been successful at raising attendance rates for boys in Alice Springs, using participation in sport and behavior modification techniques.³⁸ Where programs have been seen to be successful, consideration should be given to the suitability of extending them to other locations.

As the *Little Children are Sacred* report points out, classes of 20 children with no English or a bare minimum of understanding and whose teacher speaks only English, are unlikely to engage students without clear expectations of the teachers that teaching and learning using local languages is a vital curriculum requirement. Migrant children of non-English speaking backgrounds are given intensive support with 10 students to an ESL teacher and a support person for each class. Why do Aboriginal students from non-English speaking backgrounds receive less support? There is also a need for more intensive support for older students who have returned to school with little educational background, as well as catch up programs for students entering Year 7 with poor literacy and numeracy skills.

...in Alice Springs we are very conscious about the lack of attendance at school by Aboriginal kids, particularly the boys. Since the beginning of the year there has been a program in place called the Clontarf program. This is designed specifically to re-engage boys back at school. In the six months that that program has been operating, for the kids involved in that program we have got something like a 92 per cent attendance rate – significantly better than attendance by non-Aboriginal boys in the same schools. Those kinds of programs are particularly valuable because, first and foremost, they are not coercive – they are not punitive. Secondly, they are enormously effective in terms of changing behaviour and for kids to transition into work.

Olga Haven, coordinator, Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the Northern Territory, verbal submission to Senate Inquiry

³⁷ Northern Territory Public Sector Indigenous Employment and Career Development Strategy 2002–2006

³⁸ Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the Northern Territory, 2007, A Proposed Emergency Response and Development Plan to Protect Aboriginal Children in the Northern Territory.

Professional development, induction and teacher training

There is a need for greater access to professional development, both for teachers and other school-based staff and for those in advisory positions. Without professional development resources it is not possible to ensure that education services are of the highest quality, include cross-cultural input, and recognise the need for high level involvement of Indigenous educators, Elders, parents and community members. Encouraging Indigenous children to attend school each day requires the ability to bridge the cultural and language divide that the *Little Children are Sacred* report describes so eloquently. Moreover, teachers and other education staff need to be provided with the opportunity to learn an Indigenous language.

The current NT DEET Orientation Program for new teachers recruited to work in Indigenous schools is woefully inadequate. The department offers three days formal orientation to prepare teachers coming from often metropolitan settings in other states to deal with the NT curriculum framework, and understand the NT education structures and the nature of diverse NT locations. Ensuring success in education and in relationships for both teachers and communities requires more time and more intensive preparation, particularly when locating to a very remote and small community. In reality, not all new teachers even get the three-day induction, much less the two weeks that used to be available. Ideally, new teachers would be able to spend three or four weeks working in the community with the teacher they are replacing. At the least, teachers intending to work in remote communities should either have remote placements in their teacher training and/or an over-establishment position working with teacher mentor/s in a remote setting. This would be less costly – in both financial and educational terms – than the high level of teacher churn that currently exists in many remote communities. It is the longstanding view of the AEU that Aboriginal Studies and Torres Strait Islander Studies should be a mandatory condition of employment for all teachers in Australia and therefore built into pre-service teacher training, as well as part of the professional development offered to existing staff.

Unresponsive systems

It would be fair to say that some of the current problems relate to inappropriate or excessively bureaucratic structures that sometimes show little awareness of the realities of education life, particularly in a very remote community school. Some are unintentional consequences of well-meaning policies.

For example, the Group School structure, which was intended to support small very remote schools, has effectively led to another layer of management, lack of support, and reduced staffing as a result of Group School principal-level decisions regarding the distribution of staff within a 'one-line' budget, and financial control of small schools' resources. In some cases Group School principals with little experience of remote schools have been appointed. The apparent intention was to provide a support structure for one- to two-teacher schools but the structure now encompasses schools of at least five to six teachers plus assistant teachers/administrative officers. Far from reducing the burden on teaching principals, the Group School model is devolving more accountability to each school in the group and reducing the participation of school councils in each small community. The absence of any support for secondary programs has led to students and parents being advised to enrol in the non-government boarding schools Yirara or Kormilda, located in Alice Springs and Darwin. At one school, staff reported that children over 12 are taken off rolls and that a Group School principal stated, 'you are a primary school only – there are not enough resources to run a secondary program'. In this context, the current operation of the Groups Schools needs to be reviewed.

It is not clear to the inquiry why the Learning Lessons report, which was presented in 1999, has not received more importance and/or urgency with implementation than it has. However, a good example of the way in which governments can become hide-bound by bureaucracy is contained in the treatment of the report.

Little Children are Sacred, p. 148

One extraordinary story was of a small community in Central Australia – part of a Group School – that wished to have their school reopened. They reportedly had a meeting with a DEET officer, to whom they gave a list of some 20 names of the children who would attend the school. Many of those children were present on the day of the meeting. It has been reported that the DEET officer is waiting for a ‘formal letter’ from the community. There have been various representations to the NT Government about this school being opened, including from the AEU NT Branch.

The continued tendency in at least some parts of the system to hold information in-house and to dissuade education staff from engaging in collaborative dialogue with others can be seen in efforts to prevent staff from speaking to federal intervention teams in at least one location, or to be constrained when dealing with media in others. People on the ground continue to claim a system failure to communicate adequately about what is going on or intended.

Indigenous staff have been told they may leave the school to attend a community meeting but are not to speak about the school or on behalf of the school. The non-Indigenous staff are to remain at school until the end of the school day then may attend any public meeting but cannot speak... This directive has effectively separated the school from the community and ensured that we as educators are not able to participate in the processes taking place around this intervention. Regardless of the intervention and politics concerned, we still need to be heard and be visible. Later we were told there would be a meeting but only for executive staff.

Teacher in prescribed area

As communities move, we can't move bricks and mortar that quickly. We need to be more flexible and mobile in our delivery of education, able to follow to where people are, with at least some hub services. We need to think more creatively about infrastructure in those circumstances, like the troopies that used to be sent to town camps and homelands schools, teachers using Language and the vernacular to deliver the program. There is a policy of 'normalisation' which doesn't leave you much room to use innovative modes of delivery.

Public servant

Contracts of employment

There is a continued and unnecessary tendency to place teachers and support staff on rolling short-term contracts even when it is clear that the job is ongoing. This not only places staff under further stress but makes it much difficult for people to be able to engage with the local community, and vice versa. This is true whether the setting is urban or remote, but the problems are worse in very remote settings.

It is hard to imagine that children can be encouraged to learn, much less develop relationships with teachers, when they are faced with several teachers in a year – often with little experience of a remote community. It is hard to see how a school can develop an ongoing dialogue with the community when there may be several principals within the space of a year or two.

This turnover reflects both a failure to prepare staff for teaching in a remote community and to provide them with ongoing support and incentives to stay for longer periods. Moreover, there are many stories of teachers who have come to the Territory only to discover that the actual job was quite different from what they had been told to expect – a secondary teacher finding themselves in front of a class of some 30–35 high needs middle primary students, for example. One interstate teacher was recruited and brought a car to Darwin but found out that one couldn't drive to the school. A six month contract had been promised but the actual contract turned out to be for seven weeks. It was not an early childhood position as had been claimed.

There were 70 teachers employed this year in the mid-term intake; all are reportedly on short-term contracts.

Talking, talking. I'm sick of talking. Our contracts have been renewed for a year; will the problems go away then? It's an ongoing job but they keep us on contract. They've been talking about transport for years. Hasn't happened, we're told there is no money. It's not my job but I go and get the kids. I'm giving up. What's the use?

AIEW, town school

I came here and they gave me a seven week contract. Now they've told me I have another 10 week contract, so that's not even until the end of the year. Three weeks in and I still haven't been sent anything. I like the school and the community, I want to stay-but I'm not sure what's happening.

Teacher, remote school

Inadequate resourcing

In general, the resources committed to many of the recent initiatives have been modest. More substantial funding and resource allocation for these initiatives would have led to far greater change. This is true, for example, of the introduction of counsellors in secondary schools, the rollout of specialist secondary staff and the introduction of limited numbers of mobile relief staff to ensure that teachers receive release and preparation time. All of these initiatives have been welcomed, but they do not stretch across all schools.

Many teachers and executive teachers in remote schools still do not have access to release time – adding to an often already overwhelming level of both workload and stress. Teachers reported crawling out of their sick beds and going to school because they knew that no relief teachers would be available. The risks of burn-out are high, and too many teachers leave the Territory as a result.

More fundamentally, secondary education is being rolled out but at this stage, secondary teachers and support, particularly for senior years, are still only available in a relatively small number of communities. The revamped distance education service, together with Regional Learning Agents to be placed into remote communities, will further these goals. As the Northern Territory Government has recognised, the development of local employment is a key factor in motivating young people to stay at school.

One principal at a remote school described resourcing in his, and other similar Territory schools, in the terms “we are resourced to cope, not to succeed”.

Little Children are Sacred, p. 150

At a small nearby school, a teacher was denied a business day to see their counsellor and doctor. They were told they couldn't adjoin it to the end of term, and not to ask because they couldn't have it next term either. This is common – can't get relief teachers.

Teacher, remote school

There has been a fairer redistribution of ESL resources, increased from 50 to 60 positions, which has seen some allocated to non-urban areas, but this is not enough. The current level of need in more than 60 remote schools, including Maningrida with over 650 students, is overtaking the incremental increase in ESL specialists in classrooms. Five years ago, teachers with ESL expertise estimated that an additional 100 positions were needed. In 2007, before the impact of the federal intervention, that figure would be 120 positions.

As indicated earlier, there is inequity in the provision of additional supports for migrant non-English speakers that are not also provided to Indigenous students. ESL–ILLS funding from the Commonwealth provides support for children in Year 1 – when the need is for extended support and Indigenous Language Learning from early childhood to senior secondary.

While the NT Government has expressed support for the revitalisation of bilingual education, it has not increased the number of assistant teachers provided to Indigenous schools. A school offering bilingual education should be allocated one assistant teacher for every class/teacher, while the general allocation is currently 0.5 per class. Some schools have increased their access to assistant teachers by use of CDEP plus 'top-up' funding. Assistant teachers provide a vital link between the language, culture and expectations of Aboriginal children and the community, and the culture, language and expectations of Western schooling. Without the support of assistant teachers, many non-Indigenous teachers, who speak only English, would be unable to communicate with the children they teach in any meaningful way. Resource allocation and inadequate consultation with local educators has resulted in a departmental decision to designate schools as either a bilingual school or as participating in the Accelerated Literacy (AL) Program, but schools cannot be both. The AL schools receive an additional 0.5 accelerated literacy coordinator. A number of these coordinators are currently reported to be teaching a class where enrolments have increased, without the provision of additional teachers.

When I questioned the absence of an AT in my large class of high needs middle primary students, I was told that if I wanted the AT time I could close the preschool. The preschool experience is vital to future success, so that was not an option.

Teaching principal, remote school

The principal told us we would have to lose one of our two assistant teachers or our admin officer. We could not do without our ATs. Now we have no AO support.

Teacher, remote school

Reduced services

Some basic educational services seem to have been reduced over time. For example, Community Education Centres once offered adult education but the adult educators were withdrawn some years ago. The *Little Children are Sacred* report commented that adult and community education 'can be used to foster and support a culture that values learning throughout life', as well as provide more opportunities for Aboriginal people in remote locations to access that education. Adult education provides another route through which young people who have left school can be re-engaged in education. The report has recommended that more opportunities for adult and community education be provided.

In the early 1990s the Northern Territory had four teachers of the deaf and a program that received both national and international recognition. Now there are two people in the Alice Springs region who are responsible for a small handful of the schools and communities in the region. There is limited access to professional development for teachers of deaf children, despite the high incidence of hearing problems in Indigenous communities. This is one of the examples of where health, education and community and family services need to work closely together, so that issues relating to hearing loss are addressed from the earliest possible age and followed up. Universal neonatal screening for sensory neural hearing loss was agreed some 12 months ago but is yet to be fully rolled out.

Likewise it seems that the school library adviser position servicing remote schools will be replaced by someone in local government or community services. Joint-use library facilities are good in principle but in practice have not worked well as they do not receive education-based resources.

Staffing on attendance

Some fundamental resource issues have not been addressed at all. A significant example is the continued use of attendance figures (even with a 10 per cent margin), rather than enrolments – much less population – as the basis for staffing schools. The *Little Children are Sacred* report rightly argued ‘that it is not appropriate for the NT education system to be based on such a negative premise’, and that this policy ‘must be reviewed and reversed’.³⁹ The report noted that this discouraged some schools from doing more to get children to attend, since, they said, those children would require additional support, would be disruptive and would divert attention from the reliable students.

The impact of this when children do come to school was well illustrated in Wadeye in 2005, 2006 and again in 2007. The community made a concerted effort and the children came, but there was no space for them, there were no resources and not enough teachers. As a result, before the resources could be provided, most of them stopped coming.⁴⁰ The reality is that the Catholic primary school at Wadeye was the only school in a community with a school aged population of nearly 1,000 children, including nearly 300 secondary aged children (although a secondary school has since been established). The Catholic school is funded and staffed on the same basis as all government schools in remote regions, that is, on attendance rather than enrolments. Melbourne-based legal firm Arnold Bloch Leibler is working with others and the Wadeye community to seek redress for the underfunding of their community’s education needs. They argue that ‘for every dollar spent on the education of a child in the Northern Territory, just 43 cents is spent on the education of a child in Wadeye’.⁴¹ Funding on attendance rather than enrolments is a major reason for this difference.

This term, particularly since the federal announcements, has seen a growing number of schools with a large influx of students, many of whom need extra attention.

Waiting until the children arrive before considering the provision of additional staff and resources leads to untenable situations for teachers. Struggling to cope with huge, overcrowded classes, a number are already succumbing to illness, stress and a very strong risk of burnout. Delays are lengthened by DEET’s ‘verification’ processes and an approach that seems based on ‘let’s wait and see whether they keep coming’ before we provide extra staff – if we can find them of course. Teachers may of course collapse before the cavalry arrives. For students, this situation offers an unappealing, overcrowded

Amid criticism of the NT government after the release of the Taylor report, NT Minister for Education, Syd Stirling, explained to ABC 7.30 *Report’s* Murray McLaughlin that the boost to Wadeye school numbers in 2005 had caught the government off guard.

‘We were put on notice that this [children turning up to school] could well occur but you really can’t put the funding up until such time as that’s absolutely demonstrated in physical presence in classrooms’, Stirling said.’

‘I guess the size of the increase was a bit more than expected. Nonetheless, we can’t fund and won’t fund until those expectations are translated into students behind desks. You can’t do it any other way.’

Of course you can do it another way – what Mr Stirling is outlining is the ‘Don’t build it and they won’t come’ school of thought on education.

National Indigenous Times, 23 February 2006

Linking funding to attendance, we have lost four staff this semester. It’s lunacy – it takes more time to follow up kids who aren’t attending than those in class.

Teacher, town school

introduction to formal learning that offers little hope of their individual needs being met and almost no chance of a passionate desire for learning to be born. More is said on the current enrolment situation later.

And of course it is not always easy to quickly find staff willing to locate to a remote community. So schools find themselves without a teacher, and children are forced to either travel to another school or do not attend school at all. Schools in 2007 have been unable to find staff and remained closed or staffed by relief teachers for months at a time.

The reality is that the current staffing and resourcing model is not so much designed to enable schools to cope, but rather, seems designed to ensure they fail at the objective of enrolling and engaging all children in the community. The aim should be to target all children in the community – to staff schools based on enrolments, and to provide the support staff – including the full-time home-school liaison officer proposed by *Little Children are Sacred* for every school – to encourage all children to be enrolled and to attend.

⁴⁰ *National Indigenous Times*, ‘Wadeye: the forgotten face of government underspending’, Issue 98, 23 February 2006

⁴¹ Arnold Bloch Leibler, Media release, 20 April 2007: In the Public Interest 07

Preschool education

Preschool education continues to be under-resourced. As *Little Children are Sacred* points out, the 1999 Learning Lessons report called for guaranteed access to play centres and preschools for all children in the 3–5 age group within five years. This has not happened. Learning Lessons said that mobile preschools and playgroups were to be considered as interim solutions. Eight years on, they remain the primary method of increasing access to preschool education in remote areas.⁴² Outside that initiative, which is a positive one that has expanded access to preschool in some areas, schools are still required to have 12 enrolments in preschool in order to have a formal (staffed) preschool program – and even then, DEET can refuse to support the establishment of the program. The Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the Northern Territory have estimated that 94 per cent of remote communities do not have a preschool.⁴³

Preschool education is a vital educational experience in its own right, but it also assists children to make the transition to formal schooling. Within a play-based curriculum framework, preschool engages children with literacy and numeracy, gives them experience of books, structures and language. Without a preschool experience children who come from non-English speaking backgrounds, often with little experience of literacy in the home, are disadvantaged before they even start school. Many small remote schools have early childhood or preschool classes taught by an assistant teacher – usually without formal recognition of this responsibility. While the bilingual experience and the recognition of children's culture, strengths and knowledge provide an important and positive experience, a qualified early childhood teacher should be available to every child as well. Preschool education should be preceded by, and linked with, play groups, childcare and other programs for younger children, with community consultation on the best arrangements to meet local needs.

Current NT policy is that children in non-urban areas can attend at the age of three if accompanied by a parent/adult. Consistent with MCEETYA directions, all Indigenous children in the NT should be able to access two years of preschool education, whatever their location. It is AEU policy that while access for Indigenous children is a priority, within 10 years all children in Australia should be able to access two years of free, high quality preschool education.

Housing for Indigenous staff

A key example of the continued discrimination faced by Indigenous staff is the policy on government housing, which is available to non-Indigenous staff but not to local Indigenous staff. This is despite the realities of overcrowded and inadequate housing in communities. Former NT Housing Minister John Ah Kit informed AEU federal officers some five years ago that the NT Government intended to address this situation, which would be consistent with the *Learning Lessons* recommendations. This too has not occurred. There is a current shortage of 60 teacher houses for non-Indigenous staff even before the rightful extension to Indigenous teachers.

⁴² *Little Children are Sacred*, op. cit.

⁴³ CAO 2007, op. cit.

Recognising success

While the problems mentioned here are serious and represent an incomplete list of the issues impeding the provision of quality education to all Indigenous children, it is also true that initiatives of the type listed at the beginning of this section are making a difference to the outcomes for children in the Territory. It must again be acknowledged that there are vast numbers of people involved in education in the Territory – teachers, educators, administrators, public servants – who are dedicated, committed, highly experienced, linked to their local communities and expert at achieving a great deal with few resources. There are some very successful schools, closely linked to their communities and engaging children very successfully in the learning journey. There are communities passionate about education, that want their children to receive the best possible educational opportunities to enable them to participate fully in the life of their community and the wider Australian community.

For example, in one school of about 80 children Elders teach language and there are cultural programs, according to the report *Strong Schools, Strong Communities*. Parents and grandparents are comfortable in the school environment, there are open days, weekly sports days, family days and award nights, and families attend assembly.⁴⁴

*This is a very positive and active community. Boys who have been through ceremony have their own classrooms. Men support education and respect women and children. [A] successful school, which others should visit.*⁴⁵

The report also notes that not all schools have operational school councils and or parent advisory committees. The involvement of families and communities in determining the policy directions and priorities of the school is a vital part of ensuring educational engagement, and must be fostered.

As indicated earlier, the development of Remote Learning Partnerships such as that recently signed at Yirrkala is an important and positive step in negotiating agreed frameworks between communities and government and in empowering communities. Such agreements outline the agreed education priorities for the community and the responsibilities and obligations of each party in improving access to and participation in education, including ways to build Indigenous governance into schools.

The NT Government response to the matters raised in this brief summary would assuredly be the lack of resources to enable a more rapid approach to tackling these issues. As indicated earlier, the NT Government's approach extends far beyond the compulsory years of education that are the focus of the Federal Government's intervention on education. Whether or not the NT Government could or should have given more resources and/or commitment to particular issues, the reality is that the Northern Territory does not have the capacity to do alone all the things that need to be done to provide Territorians and, in particular Indigenous Territorians in remote communities, with the same opportunities and services that are available to other Australians.

⁴⁴ NTCOGSO, 2007, Interim Report – July 2007, Strong Schools Strong Communities, NTCOGSO/DEST

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

The effect of federal funding changes

Any discussion of the problems facing the NT education system would be incomplete without acknowledging the effect of federal funding changes on programs and on school communities. The consequences across Australia of the changes to Indigenous Education for 2005–08 Quadrennial funding have been reported elsewhere in some detail.⁴⁶

The most serious impact has been caused by the loss of ASSPA (Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness) funding. ASSPA committees provided a strong link between schools and their communities and a forum in which to plan goals together. Many schools are now reporting much reduced involvement by their communities. The present submission writing process is another burden on teachers. Community involvement in schooling is critical and it is evident that the restoration of a funding stream like the ASSPA model would help those relationships redevelop.

More generally, much of the federal funding is primarily short-term. This leads to on-and-off programs and insecurity of employment for staff. It also involves constant submission writing for various projects in order to achieve often small amounts of funding for particular programs.

We used to get about \$30,000 for ASSPA before, and had a strong committee. Now, there is far less community interaction, although we try. People say the teachers can write the submissions. We wrote seven submissions last term – and got two funded.

We held a meeting yesterday and no one from the School Council was here.

Teacher, very remote school

The loss of ASSPA has been enormous, as dramatic in its way as the gutting of ATSIC. It gave a tremendous sense of control and pride to Indigenous members of school communities. We are struggling to get the PSPI group to meet – it's usually now the AIEW, the AP and me.

School councillor, town school

There are two youth programs which many kids at risk attend... These programs have been cut by the Commonwealth and the kids will be back out on the street.

John Ah Kit, member, Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the Northern Territory, verbal submission to Senate inquiry

⁴⁶ See Moyle D., 2004, Report on Changes to Indigenous Education 2005–2008 Quadrennial Funding, AEU; Moyle D., 2005, Report of a Survey of Schools on the Changes in Commonwealth Indigenous Education Funding, AEU, www.aeufederal.org.au and Inquiry into the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment Bill 2005, Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee report, August 2005

Growing enrolments

A growing number of schools are feeling the impact of often large increases in enrolments over recent weeks. Class sizes in some places have become totally unmanageable and exceed DEET policy on maximum size.

At Maningrida, 38 to 40 children are attending each of the transition and Year 1 classes. There were 58 children enrolled in the preschool, with one teacher and one assistant teacher. With toddlers and parents, there were 100 people in the preschool, attending all day because the community did not want the group to be split. The group was nonetheless split, which led to attendance dropping. The latest report indicates there are now some 40 children plus 12–15 adults. At this stage no additional teacher is proposed. Rather than welcoming the enthusiasm and ensuring the necessary staffing and resources are available, the effective response has been to discourage the community.

While numbers fluctuate, at the time of writing, reports of increased enrolments also include:

Nyirripi: 43 children on the roll in a one-teacher school. There is an Accelerated Literacy Program teacher there this term who is now running a second class. This means that there is no release time available and if one is sick, the other teacher has more than 40 children in the class.

Ngukurr: more than 59 children in the preschool, with only one teacher and insufficient space. There are also enrolment increases in transition and Years 1 and 2. There is no housing available for additional teachers.

Tennant Creek Primary: an increase of more than 30 new enrolments in transition and Year 1: the school has been told to write a submission for an additional teacher.

Elcho Island: more than 30 children per classroom in the early and middle years. The school is experiencing a big influx of returnees who have had a long gap from school, and is bursting at the seams.

Docker River: the number of students has doubled – a two-teacher school with over 50 enrolled students.

At Impana and Mutijulu, early childhood numbers are rising.

Assessing unmet need in education

The Northern Territory Government's 'Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage – Generational Plan of Action' package in response to the *Little Children are Sacred* report allocates \$70.7 million for education. The funding will provide six new mobile preschool education services, increase the number of school teachers by 26, build 15 classrooms, upgrade two Homeland learning centres and 15 community education centres and establish a school attendance team.⁴⁷ It does not change the current process of staffing schools on attendance.

The Federal Government's funding for the intervention includes \$16 million to improve teacher workforce capacity and increase the number of classrooms. Funding is for 12 months only.

As suggested earlier, the focus of the Northern Territory Government has been on developing education access from preschool through to Year 12 and beyond. The current federal intervention is focused primarily on the compulsory years of school and the welfare measures seem directed to this end. The reality is that families and communities are more likely to respond to the call to engage with education without reference to compulsory age requirements. For example, as current experiences in a number of Territory schools indicate, the influx will include preschool aged children who will need to be accommodated. It is also a question as to whether only communities in prescribed areas will respond, given both that the widespread publicity is likely to encourage a wider response and that the government's longer-term intentions will broaden the reach of the welfare measures.

Fundamentally, a whole of government response is required to provide all children with a quality education and to engage communities. Any assessment of the likely costs of expanding education provision therefore needs to be looked at on this basis.

Education participation rates

As the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) noted in its submission to the Senate Inquiry that there is no reliable public data about Indigenous school participation rates mapped against ABS population data. The Commission noted that the NT Minister for Education could not provide an actual figure of the number of school-aged children without access to primary and secondary education 'though he does say the number is "significant"':

HREOC argued that:

*This situation is now urgent given that under the NTNER measures, carers of children will have their welfare payments quarantined if they do not send their children to school. The Northern Territory Government must assess where there is no school provision and make concerted efforts to provide reasonable school access for all school-aged Northern Territory children.*⁴⁸

The NT Department of Employment, Education and Training is planning over the next weeks to undertake an assessment of existing data sets in partnership with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to try to develop a more certain picture.

For the present, DEET has estimated that there could be as many as 2,000 children aged 6–15 who are not enrolled in compulsory schooling and a further 2,000 children aged 3–5 who may access early childhood services. No estimate of the number of post-compulsory-aged students who could attend has been published. When these are added, Snowden's estimate (noted earlier) was that there could be as many as 5,000 potential students under the age of 18 in remote areas who have no access to secondary or vocational education.

⁴⁷ www.action.nt.gov.au

⁴⁸ HREOC submission to Senate Inquiry, August 2007

Estimated education participation rate of NT Indigenous children⁴⁹

	Indigenous population by age	Enrolments	Estimated participation rate (%)	Missing out (No.)
Preschool 3–4 yr olds	2,651	943	35.6	1,708
Primary 5–11 yr olds	9,012	7,371	81.8	1,641
Secondary/VET 12–17 yr olds	7,151	3,026	42.3	4,125
Total	18,814	11,340	60.3	7,474

Data from the 2006 Census is now available. It too has its problems since numbers are too small to allow publication of small areas in the NT. Moreover, of the 21,030 Indigenous persons in the Territory who indicate that they are enrolled in an education institution, 8,683 do not specify the type of educational institution. This is actually 41.2 per cent of people identifying as Indigenous students. While not identifying type of institution may be more likely outside compulsory schooling years, we cannot be certain. At the very least the data in the Census suggests that a considerable number of students continue to miss out.

The NT Government has estimated that some 2,000 potential students are not enrolled in school. On an ESL-based teacher allocation of 1:10, this would require an additional 200 teachers. In addition, these classes would require provision of an assistant teacher and there would be further costs, such as additional specialist staff, recruitment and relocation costs and teacher training required. The annual cost of providing for an additional 2,000 school students is estimated at \$30 million.

The table above assumes, in line with MCEETYA policy directions, that all Indigenous children aged three and four years should be able to enrol in preschool education, whatever their location. Five-year-olds, who would be expected to be in the transition year, are included in primary school. Given the above caveats, the data available from the Census suggests that nearly 7,500 children could be missing out on preschool and school education.

Preschool teachers are able to cater for two groups of students on a sessional or part-time basis.

On a teacher ratio of 1:10, provision for all Territory Indigenous children aged 3–17 years who are currently not enrolled would require an estimated additional 660 teachers. Additional specialist support and other system costs would also be required. Provision for an additional 7,500 students aged 3–17 would cost up to an estimated \$99 million per annum.

⁴⁹ ABS 2068.0-2006 Census Tables: Age by Indigenous status by sex and type of educational institution attending by Indigenous status by sex, Northern Territory

School attendance

The Northern Territory Government has estimated that in the prescribed communities 8,000 Indigenous students are enrolled, with an average attendance rate of 60 per cent. If attendance increases to 100 per cent, in effect there would be an additional 3,200 full-time equivalent students to be catered for, and on a teacher ratio of 1:10, an additional 300 teachers would be required. The estimated costs of catering for full attendance of these students is \$45 million.

Assuming that the average attendance rate for Indigenous students is 60 per cent across the Territory, 100 per cent attendance by the 18,800 students currently enrolled would in effect mean that there would be the equivalent of an additional 7,526 students attending, of whom around 1,060 would be preschool students attending on a part-time or sessional basis.

On a teacher ratio of 1:10, full time provision for all Indigenous children aged 3–17 years who are currently enrolled but have an average attendance of 60 per cent would require an estimated additional 700 teachers. Assistant teachers, additional specialist support and other system costs would also be required. Provision for all currently enrolled Indigenous students to participate fully could cost up to an estimated \$105 million per annum.

Additional support costs

It should be noted that many students will be engaging or re-engaging in school with poor literacy and numeracy skills and possibly low levels of standard Australian English. In addition, many children will have experienced trauma and abuse. Many are likely to require additional support, such as counselling services and intensive transition support.

Further, many children are also likely to be suffering from health problems and will require additional support. For example in 2004, 62 per cent of children in remote NT communities aged 4–16 years were identified with varying degrees of hearing loss in one or both ears.⁵⁰ As the above account made clear, current levels of support services are inadequate and will need to be expanded to cater for the additional students. *Little Children are Sacred* called for the employment of another 20 counsellors. Even more would need to be employed if enrolment and attendance numbers increase as envisaged.

In addition, as *Little Children are Sacred* made clear, class sizes need to be reduced and separate classes offered for boys and girls aged 12 and over where communities require this.

Provision would also need to be made for a full-time assistant teacher in every Indigenous primary class to ensure that an Indigenous language speaker is available in the class. This would require around 150 additional assistant teachers to augment existing provision plus another 150 or so for the new classes of children currently not enrolled in primary schooling, at an estimated cost of around \$18 million.

⁵⁰ AIHW 2007, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2006 Report: Detailed Analysis*, AIHW

The *Little Children are Sacred* report recommended the provision of a home liaison officer in every school. Provision of say, 100 of these positions is likely to cost around \$15 million per annum.

As *Little Children are Sacred* also recommended, AIEWs should be employed in every school.

There are probably up to around 50 employed currently, so another 100 or so AIEWs will be required. This may cost around \$15 million per annum.

In addition, *Little Children are Sacred* called for greater provision of adult and community education in regional and remote locations.

The report also called for the establishment of additional residential schools. The AEU supports the re-establishment of government residential hostels and/or schools, but notes that care must be taken to ensure that such settings are located carefully so that they are not competing with existing secondary schools for the same students.

Recruitment and relocation of teachers and provision of a three week induction/orientation program, which would enable incoming teachers to work with existing teachers in remote schools, would require additional resources. There is also a need for increased access to professional development of existing staff, language education and incentive programs to encourage people to stay in remote schools longer.

Infrastructure requirements

Many remote schools currently have under-utilised capacity although there is a need for refurbishment and upgrades in order to bring facilities up to standard. Full attendance by existing students would require additional classrooms. Enrolment of the additional children who are currently not enrolled would require a substantial number of additional classrooms. Additional teacher housing will need to be provided. This includes accommodation for Indigenous teachers who are currently denied the housing that is provided to non-Indigenous teachers in remote communities. Altman has estimated that the infrastructure costs just for remote communities will be around \$295 million. In the context of rising enrolments that exceed capacity, mobile housing and classrooms must be considered as an interim measure.

If provision is made for all Indigenous children in the Territory to enrol and attend, more classrooms will be required and the likely cost is about \$375–\$440 million.

Estimated total costs of full participation in school

The NT Minister for Employment, Education and Training has been quoted as saying that more than 500 teachers and the accompanying one-off infrastructure requirements would cost in the order of \$374 million.⁵¹

Professor Altman has estimated that to include the 2,000 children of compulsory age who are currently not enrolled and to have the 8,000 children in the prescribed areas attend every day would cost around \$79 million per year plus infrastructure costs of \$295 million. Over five years, the cost for remote communities would be an extra \$690 million.⁵²

The AEU proposes a more holistic perspective. It is time to ensure that all Indigenous children and young people aged 3–17 participate fully in schooling, from two years of preschool education through to Year 12 – and beyond. Current reports from NT schools already experiencing increased enrolments show that these are not restricted to the compulsory years of schooling. Children who re-engage with schooling after a sometimes long absence, or who have not been attending more than about 60 per cent of the time, will need additional resources in order to be able to ‘catch up’ to other students. Many Indigenous children have suffered trauma and abuse, many have health issues – such as hearing loss – which will require more intensive educational support. Indigenous children who come to school speaking no or little standard Australian English should have the same levels of learning support as is provided to migrant and refugee children from ESL backgrounds.

To ensure that all Indigenous children aged 3–17 years, wherever they may live in the Territory, go to preschool and school regularly will require:

around 1,360 additional teachers	about \$204 million per annum
around 300 additional assistant teachers for primary schools	about \$18 million per annum
around 85 teacher assistants for preschool programs	about \$12 million per annum
around 100 additional home liaison officers	about \$15 million per annum
around 100 additional Aboriginal and Islander Education workers	about \$15 million per annum
Total operational costs	about \$264 million per annum
One-off infrastructure costs	around \$375–\$440 million.

In addition, there will be further costs relating to, for example, increased school and student support services and the recruitment and training of new staff.

⁵¹ *Centralian Advocate*, ‘All kids must go to school’, 5 July 2007

⁵² Altman J.C., 2007, ‘Stabilise, normalize and exit = \$4 billion. Cheap at the price?’, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Topical Issue No.8/2007, June 2007

Over five years, the estimated cost of full education provision for all Indigenous children aged 3–17 years in the Northern Territory is around \$1.7 billion.

The Northern Territory Government has recently released its 'Closing the Gap of Indigenous Disadvantage' package in response to the *Little Children are Sacred* report. It provides for an additional \$286.4 million over five years for a range of measures to address the recommendations of the report. This includes \$70.7 million for education, to provide six new mobile preschool education services, increase the number of school teachers by 26, build 15 classrooms, upgrade two Homeland learning centres and 15 community education centres and establish a school attendance team.⁵³

Welcome as these measures are, they are clearly insufficient to seriously address the current levels of disadvantage and infrastructure needs. Nor will they go far in addressing the impact of a massive and perhaps sudden increase in enrolments in response to the Commonwealth 'welfare reform' measures.

The AEU recognises that it will take time to implement the proposals outlined in this vision for

an education future in the Northern Territory. It will take time to train significantly more Indigenous teachers and to recruit and train additional teachers from within and outside the Territory. It will take time to build new classrooms and schools.

It will take time to consult and negotiate partnerships with communities about the sharing of responsibilities to ensure that all children can participate successfully in a quality education, from preschool through to Year 12 and beyond. It will take time to build trust.

But a beginning must be made and the resources must be committed to enable quality education to be rolled out to all children in the Northern Territory at the greatest possible speed. The resourcing of schools must be restructured to build success rather than to encourage failure, and a move to staffing schools on enrolments rather than attendance – with the expectation that all parties will be involved in working to ensure that children do attend is an important step in that process. There is much to be done but we need to start.

⁵³ NT Government website, www.nt.gov.au

Why the Commonwealth Government must increase funding to the Northern Territory

The main source of revenue for the Northern Territory is the GST, which provides 65 per cent of total public revenue. Specific Purpose Payments from the Federal Government provide another 15 per cent of Territory revenue and 20 per cent is drawn from the Territory's own revenue sources.⁵⁴ The Territory receives a greater share of GST than other states because of a lower capacity to raise own-source revenue and higher need for – and costs of – service delivery.

The Territory's capacity to raise revenue is the lowest of all states and has shown a decline over the six-year period to 2005–06. The latest assessment by the Commonwealth Grants Commission noted that 'in summary, the below average revenue raising capacity was related to the Territory's less developed private sector', which had both direct and indirect impacts on the tax base.⁵⁵

The Territory has higher expenditure requirements than other states because of the very high costs of providing virtually all government services.

The Commonwealth Grants Commission noted that:

...the Northern Territory had above-average proportions of its population of school age, with low fluency in English, living in remote areas or who were Indigenous. These are groups known to be higher or more costly users of government services. The Northern Territory also faced diseconomies of scale in essential administrative and policy areas because of its small population and its population settlement pattern, which is the most dispersed of all States. As a result, the Northern Territory's costs of providing services were above those of all States and above the Australian average... In summary, the Northern Territory had the highest assessed costs of service provision of any State – almost two and a half times the average in the five years to 2005–06.⁵⁶

Under the principles of horizontal fiscal equalisation, the relative fiscal capacity of each state is assessed by the Commonwealth Grants Commission, taking into account revenue raising capacity and relevant cost disabilities. For 2007–08, the Northern Territory has been assessed as requiring \$10,553 per capita compared to an Australian average of \$2,417, in order to provide an average level of services.⁵⁷ Indigenous influences account for nearly half the redistribution to the Northern Territory.⁵⁸

The assessment process used to determine the distribution of GST funds between the states does not take policy issues into account. Nor is it an assessment of real need since it is designed to distribute a given sum of funding. Such a funding mechanism cannot address the levels of disadvantage, nor the inadequate access to essential services currently experienced by most Indigenous Territorians.

In 2006, the NT Government commissioned Professor Kenneth Wilshire to undertake a review of Indigenous expenditure in the Northern Territory.⁵⁹ The review estimated that in 2004–05, 49.7 per cent of the Territory's expenditure and 43.2 per cent of total revenue was Indigenous related. Spending per capita related to Indigenous people was 2.44 times higher than for non-Indigenous people. Yet 'outcomes for Indigenous Territorians across a wide range of indicators remain poor relative to those of non-Indigenous Territorians.'

Over the next 20 years, the NT population is projected to increase at a faster rate than that for Australia as a whole. For example, school education needs are projected to increase by almost 20 per cent in the Territory as a result of demographic change, compared to 6 per cent nationally.⁶⁰ This in itself will create significant pressures on resources and infrastructure. That is in addition to the need to address the current levels of backlog and under-resourcing.

⁵⁴ Northern Territory 2007–08 Budget Paper No. 2, *Fiscal and Economic Outlook*

⁵⁵ Commonwealth Grants Commission 2007, *Relative Fiscal Capacities of the States 2007*, Commonwealth of Australia

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Commonwealth Grants Commission 2007, *Report on State Revenue Sharing Relativities, 2007 Update*, Commonwealth of Australia

⁵⁸ Northern Territory Budget Paper No. 2, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ Wilshire, Professor K., 2006, *Indigenous Expenditure Review*, Northern Territory Government.

⁶⁰ Northern Territory Budget Paper No. 2 *op. cit.*

Professor Jon Altman, of the ANU's Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research has estimated that \$4 billion over five years is required to tackle the key systemic issues of housing, health, education and employment in the Northern Territory. He has acknowledged that this estimate, particularly in relation to housing, was conservative and has noted that journalist Lenore Taylor of *The Australian Financial Review* increased it to \$5 billion. Altman's estimate for additional education costs was an extra \$690 million over five years for remote communities alone.⁶¹

In addition, Altman has noted that his estimate did not cover the costs of the immediate 'stabilisation' phase involving additional police and doctors, deployments, government appointed managers, nor the costs involved in the legislated leasing of land from Indigenous communities.

The \$587.2 million which has been appropriated by the Federal Government is intended for an initial 12 month period. More than half of the total appropriation – \$320.8 million – is departmental expenditure and capital expenses to meet the costs of increased personnel, staff accommodation, infrastructure upgrades and improved IT capacity across a number of agencies. It includes \$16 million to improve teacher workforce capacity and increase the number of classrooms.⁶²

The government has said that:

The Enhancing Education measure aims to ensure that there is sufficient school capacity as changes to welfare requirements including income quarantining results in increased enrolments and attendance at school.⁶³

Breakfast and lunch will be provided for children in the prescribed communities, with most of the cost to be met by parents through quarantined welfare payments.

While providing education facilities is the responsibility of the Northern Territory Government, the Australian Government will be assisting, where necessary, with adequate capacity and resources in affected schools to meet the anticipated demand for places within the prescribed communities, as attendance and enrolment increase as a result of emergency measures.⁶⁴

A total of \$24.4 million has been appropriated by the Federal Government for education purposes. This includes the capacity to provide additional classrooms at schools in the prescribed areas where increased enrolments cannot be accommodated; the extension of the accelerated literacy approach (scaffolding literacy) to schools in the prescribed areas not already using it; offers adoption of MULTILIT instruction for school aged children who are currently non-regular attendees or not enrolled at school; and funds to develop a Quality Teaching Package to be agreed between the NT Government, other education providers and the federal Minister for Education, Science and Training. DEST will receive funding support to implement the emergency response.

Yet, as has been reported earlier, the influx of additional students in a number of schools in remote areas, including prescribed areas, has not led to date to any federal resources being provided to enable schools to cope with the additional students.

The NT Government's 'Closing the Gap' package in response to the *Little Children are Sacred* report provides for an additional \$286.4 million over five years for a range of measures to address the recommendations of the report. This includes \$70.7 million for education, as indicated earlier, for mobile preschool education services, increased numbers of school teachers and infrastructure.

⁶¹ Altman J.C., 2007, 'Stabilise, normalize and exit = \$4 billion. Cheap at the price?', Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Topical Issue No.8/2007, June 2007

⁶² Webb R. and Dow C., 2007, Parliamentary Library Bills Digest, Appropriation (Northern Territory National Emergency Response) Bill (No.1) 2007–2008 and Parliamentary Library Bills Digest, Appropriation (Northern Territory National Emergency Response) Bill (No. 2) 2007–2008

⁶³ FACSIA, Summary Fact Sheet 1, at www.facsia.gov.au/nter/docs/legis_factsheet_01.htm

⁶⁴ www.facsia.gov.au/nter/docs/legis_factsheet_08.htm

Welcome as these measures are, they are clearly insufficient to seriously address the current levels of disadvantage and infrastructure needs. Nor will they go far in addressing the impact of a massive and perhaps sudden increase in enrolments in response to the Commonwealth 'welfare reform' measures.

As indicated above, the AEU's own assessment of what would be needed to ensure that all Indigenous children in the Northern Territory are provided with access to quality schooling that fully engages them and prepares them for a positive and productive future is an estimated \$1.7 billion over five years.

The package released by the NT Government may or may not be the best level of support that the Territory Government can offer on these issues. On particular aspects, undoubtedly it could be expected to do more. However, the resources required to deliver equitable services and living standards to Indigenous Territorians across the whole range of issues which must be addressed are beyond the capacity of the Northern Territory Government to deliver alone.

As the 2006 NT Indigenous Expenditure Review commented:

Despite high levels of expenditure and recent improvements in life expectancy, infant mortality and educational outcomes, a strong case exists that current funding mechanisms are insufficient to: overcome the level of disadvantage faced by Indigenous Territorians; equalise outcomes and overcome the well-documented backlogs of infrastructure, such as essential services and housing; and provide the range of economic and social services available to most Australians.

There is clearly a need for funding streams to the Territory in addition to those delivered through HFE and the interrelated SPPS so that the social wellbeing of the Indigenous population can be improved, economic participation and productivity be enhanced, and all Australians can benefit from improved economic activity and social cohesion. Put simply, provision of average services will not reduce levels of disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Territorians and indeed other Indigenous Australians, particularly in remote locations.⁶⁵

Recent reports have suggested that the Federal Government has been spending less than claimed on Indigenous funding. It has been reported that the government 'stand[s] accused of claiming to have spent hundreds of millions of dollars on Indigenous affairs when the money has either never been spent, has been used to benefit all Australians or has been used to oppose native title claims'. This includes about \$30 million used to fight native title and compensation claims over six years, \$19 million spent on the National Museum's Indigenous programs and underspending of \$109 million last year on Indigenous programs including family violence, children and drug programs.⁶⁶

There are three compelling reasons for the Federal Government to provide the resources required to ensure that all Territorians have access to the essential services and infrastructure available to other Australians.

The Northern Territory cannot resource the unmet needs of Territorians alone. As a nation, we have a responsibility to ensure that all Australians are provided with equitable access to essential infrastructure and services and with equal opportunities to build better futures for themselves and their families. In particular, we have a responsibility to nurture and protect the nation's children and ensure their futures. These are our obligations under international covenants. These are our obligations as members together of the Australian community.

There has been some ambiguity in the Federal Government's response on the resourcing required to address the issues faced by the Northern Territory. On the one hand, the government has argued that it is there for the long haul. On the other, there has been a tendency to suggest that the need for ongoing resources in key areas such as health and education are the responsibility of the NT Government.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ *The Australian*, 22 August 2007, 'Dodson says plan will wind clock back'

Minister Brough, for example, has criticised the degree of resourcing offered by the NT Government in its 'Closing the Gap' package.⁶⁷ The Operational Commander of the Northern Territory Emergency Taskforce, Major General Chalmers, has indicated that children are being referred to NT Health for follow-up on health checks, where some of them are apparently already on waiting lists. He did, however, also indicate his expectation of additional measures in subsequent years.⁶⁸

Notwithstanding the ambiguity of some statements in relation to the level of Commonwealth responsibility, the Federal Minister has said:

*The need is urgent and immediate and the government is stepping up to the plate to provide the necessary funding now for additional police, for health checks, for welfare reform and for other measures necessary to achieve these outcomes. But we also recognise that the longer-term action is required to normalise arrangements in these communities. Funding for housing in remote communities received a major boost in this year's budget. Separate funds will be provided for other longer-term measures in the next budget process.*⁶⁹

Without a longer-term and serious resource commitment, the Federal Government intervention will have led only to increased anger, despair and hopelessness.

The third reason for the Federal Government to commit to a substantial resource input to meet the issues addressed in the *Little Children are Sacred* report, including education, is – to put it quite simply – because it can. For all the Federal Government's talk in recent years about the GST 'windfall' to the states, the reality is that Commonwealth revenue has grown at a far greater rate. Commonwealth funding of the states has remained at about 5 per cent of GDP since the GST was introduced, down from the 6–7 per cent of earlier times.⁷⁰ Yet it is the state and territory governments that provide Australian citizens with most of the services that are essential to their wellbeing.

As the 2007–08 Northern Territory budget commented:

*... based on 2006–07 estimates, Australian Government own-purpose revenue will have grown by almost \$70 billion since the first year of the GST compared to \$13 billion for each of GST and state own-tax revenue. The Australian Government's projected cash surplus of \$11.8 billion in 2006–07 is almost six times the \$2 billion excess of GST revenue over previous financial arrangements, and around 30 per cent of states' total GST revenue in 2006–07.*⁷¹

In fact recent reports indicate that the 2006-07 federal budget surplus has risen to \$17.3 billion – up \$3.7 billion in just over three months.⁷² This unbudgeted increase in the federal surplus would in itself make a fine beginning to addressing the resource needs of the Northern Territory. But as a wealthy nation, we know that we can – and must – do more to redress the inequities faced by our First Nations peoples.

⁶⁷ Brough M., 'NT response – Underwhelming and poses more questions than it answers', Media Release 20 August 2007

⁶⁸ Senate Inquiry op. cit., Hansard

⁶⁹ House of Representatives Hansard, 7 August 2007, p. 11, quoted in Senate Inquiry report op. cit.

⁷⁰ *The Age*, 23 August 2007, p. 2

⁷¹ NT Budget paper No. 2 op. cit.

⁷² *The Age*, 22 August 2007, p. 1

Conclusion

The AEU calls on the Federal and Northern Territory governments to commit to the provision of quality education for all children in the Northern Territory, from two years of preschool education to Year 12 and beyond into tertiary education.

This will require substantial additional resources to be provided to the Northern Territory.

It is the responsibility of families and communities to ensure that their children participate fully in education and the opportunities that it will provide them to build better futures for themselves and their communities. It is the responsibility of governments to ensure that those opportunities are made available to all Australians. Access to education is a fundamental right and the provision of high quality education for all Territory children will not only improve their futures, and those of their communities, but will benefit the nation as a whole.

Implementation of this plan for education will require consultation and the building of partnerships with every community. This does not mean making education and other essential services dependent on communities doing the bidding of governments or their local delegates. Access to education and other basic services is a right – and a responsibility of our elected governments – across the Northern Territory just as it is in Melbourne or Sydney or Canberra. But it does mean negotiating partnerships with communities about the sharing of responsibilities to ensure that all children can participate successfully in a quality education, from preschool through to Year 12 and beyond.

The vision of universal education will not be achieved overnight. But a beginning must be made and the resources committed for the longer-term objectives. Resourcing of education must be restructured to build – and expect – success, rather than encourage failure.

As the *Little Children are Sacred* report has made very clear, the challenges are complex and cannot be dealt with in isolation. Successful education requires good health and the opportunities to build enterprises and employment, family and community support services and the other basic infrastructure of community life that many people in metropolitan areas take for granted. Perhaps more than anything, success will require the rebuilding of hope and trust and engagement through the development of real partnerships between communities, services providers and governments.

There is much to be done – and it is more than time we started.

Appendix 1:

ABS Census of Population and Housing: NT population and enrolment data

Indigenous children's participation rates in preschool education 2006

Northern Territory	3 year olds	4 year olds	Total 3 & 4 year olds	Preschool enrolments	Number missing out	Estimated participation rate (%)
Alice Springs	96	111	207	90	117	43.5
Apatula	200	202	402	118	284	29.4
Darwin	258	239	497	231	266	46.5
Jabiru	246	260	506	143	363	28.3
Katherine	198	250	448	152	296	33.9
Nhulunbuy	232	211	443	170	273	38.4
Tennant Creek	75	67	142	42	100	29.6
	1,305	1,340	2,645	946	1,699	35.8

Three-year-old Indigenous children are only able to enrol in non-urban ('remote') areas. Yet overall Indigenous preschool participation rates are higher in urban centres.

On the basis of current entitlement, the participation rate for four-year-olds in Alice Springs is 81.8 per cent and for Darwin, 96.7 per cent.

Indigenous children's participation in primary school 2006

Northern Territory	5-11 year olds	Enrolments	Number missing out	Estimated participation rate (%)
Alice Springs	677	566	111	83.6
Apatula	1,378	1,146	232	83.2
Darwin	1,867	1,787	80	95.7
Jabiru	1,645	1,264	381	76.8
Katherine	1,446	1,192	254	82.4
Nhulunbuy	1,445	1,018	427	70.4
Tennant Creek	537	394	143	73.4
	8,995	7,367	1,628	81.9

Indigenous children's participation in secondary school 2006

Northern Territory	12-17 year olds	Enrolments	Number missing out	Estimated participation rate (%)
Alice Springs	585	337	248	57.6
Apatula	1,161	316	845	27.2
Darwin	1,642	951	691	57.9
Jabiru	1,166	318	848	27.3
Katherine	1,105	393	712	35.6
Nhulunbuy	1,035	441	594	42.6
Tennant Creek	443	127	316	28.7
	7,137	2,883	4,254	40.4

Secondary enrolments listed include 139 VET/TAFE enrolments of 15-24-year-olds.

Appendix 2:

Education Recommendations of the Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse 2007, *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle* “Little Children are Sacred”

50. That, given that children and young people who chronically non-attend or are excluded from school are severely disadvantaged and that there is a correlation between school non-attendance and criminal activity, poverty, unemployment, homelessness, violence and sexual abuse, the government must as a matter of highest priority ensure:

1. the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) implements the attendance strategies set out in the Education Chapter and any other strategies required to ensure all children of school age attend school on a daily basis, in accordance with DEET’s responsibilities to provide compulsory education for all school-age children.
2. every child aged 3 years by 1 February 2008 should attend, on or about that date, and continuously thereafter, a pre-school program.
3. every child aged 5 years by 1 February 2008 should attend, on or about that date, a full-time transition program and, in this regard, DEET to re-visit recommendations No. 80–86 of the *Learning Lessons* report (1999) and complete their implementation.

51. That by reference to the very considerable work already done as part of the *Learning Lessons* report and by the Learning Lessons Implementation Steering Committee (2002–2005) and the review which resulted in the *Indigenous Languages and Culture in Northern Territory Schools Report 2004–2005*, the Inquiry recommends DEET examines issues such as:

- a. pedagogy
- b. how best to deliver the same outcomes for Aboriginal students as other students
- c. flexibility in the timing of the school year
- d. smaller class sizes especially in lower grades
- e. remedial classes for students who have been out of school for some time
- f. separate classes for boys and girls aged 12 and above
- g. employment of Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (AIEW) in all schools
- h. cross-cultural training for Aboriginal children on “dominant culture” and all children to be taught about Aboriginal people’s history and culture.

52. That, with reference to the wealth of existing knowledge and reports such as *Learning Lessons* and *Indigenous Languages and Culture in Northern Territory Schools* coupled with the need to have good teachers, healthy and secure students and ownership of the educational system by the local communities, DEET:

a. introduce a universal meals program for Aboriginal students (breakfast, morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea) with parents to contribute to the cost of providing meals and the community or volunteers to undertake food preparation

b. appoint a full time home-school liaison officer for every school

c. appoint 20 additional school counsellors to service those schools currently without such counsellors i.e. the major remote towns, the town camps in the regional centres, and one in each group school (i.e. those schools in remote areas which supply services to a number of smaller schools in the area)

d. encourage the utilisation of schools after hours for purposes such as community centres, supervised homework rooms, community meeting rooms, adult education and training courses

e. appoint an AIEW coordinator to enhance the role and functioning of AIEW staff to recognise they are significant members of the school support team e.g. review their role within the school community, enhance recruitment and develop their capacity

f. consider the introduction of teacher employment initiatives such as remote teacher incentive packages to encourage teachers to remain in remote communities for three years or longer.

53. That, notwithstanding that Northern Territory schools have a single curricula framework, DEET is to ensure all teachers in remote schools consult with local communities as to any appropriate modifications, consistent with Recommendations 100, 102, 106, 107 and 108 in the *Learning Lessons* report.

54. That DEET urgently implements the outcomes of the *Indigenous Languages and Culture* report.

55. That early consideration be given to the provision of additional residential schools for Aboriginal students, designed specifically for them and being located within reasonable proximity to their country to enable maintenance of family and cultural ties, taking into account prospects for the involvement of the non-government sector and for Australian Government funding.

56. That in order to foster and support a culture that values learning throughout life and provides for those people who identify a need or desire for further education, the government acknowledge the importance of adult and community education and provide more opportunities for Aboriginal people in regional and remote locations to access that education.

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