

Bankstown rally marks 5 years of NT Intervention, says no to government income management

A rally marking five years since the announcement of the NT Intervention and protesting the expansion of income management will be held tomorrow in Bankstown, Sydney.

The rally will call for 'Stronger Futures' legislation to be immediately withdrawn, ahead of a Senate debate on the new laws on Monday, June 18.

'Stronger Futures' will extend key NT Intervention powers for a further 10 years. It will also boost the power of government agencies to quarantine Centrelink payments and expand the income management scheme across Australia, starting with the Bankstown Local Government Area (LGA) and four other "trial sites".

The rally will hear from organisations, residents and trade union representatives involved in the Campaign Coalition 'Say No to Government Income Management: Not in Bankstown Not Anywhere', along with Aboriginal leaders discussing the horrific impact of the NT Intervention.

The rally comes following a packed seminar of union and community activists in Bankstown on May 26 which called for a community wide boycott of income management - both to try and stop the expansion in Bankstown and protest human rights abuses in the NT.

Last week also saw the release of a damning report by the Commonwealth Ombudsman into the operations of the "Vulnerable Income Management" measure in the NT, one of the categories being introduced in Bankstown. The report documents systematic discrimination by Centrelink social workers and says that 95 per cent of referrals onto the system lacked any evidence base.

George Pascoe is a community leader from Maningrida who is traveling to speak at the rally. Mr Pascoe was part of a meeting of the Yolngu Nations Assembly who released a major statement of opposition to Stronger Futures on May 2. The statement threatens a boycott of all community and mining lease negotiations and has gained widespread support, including from the Catholic Church and the Congress of Australia's First Peoples.

Mr Pascoe says:

"We have lived under the dictatorship of the Intervention for five years and we say no more. We are struggling to cope. The timeline of history has been reversed - it's like we are living under the protection board again, or the apartheid regime they had in South Africa. We have no freedom."

"The white people run everything now and they just come and go. They took away many of our self-managed programs. Skilled workers can't get any employment and there are masses of people on Centrelink."

"Income management and the BasicsCard has created huge problems for us, it makes life so much harder. We can no longer teach our children to deal with money. We have no self-determination at all."

"We need to drive things from the grass-roots level and base our future on Aboriginal customary law. We can run things for ourselves, but this government will not give us a chance. They came to

Maningrida with a Senate committee but they did not listen to us, they already had their agenda", concluded Mr Pascoe.

Pam Batkin is a spokesperson for the Campaign Coalition and Executive Officer of Woodville community services in the Bankstown LGA:

"Income Management is bad social policy. It is bad social policy because it doesn't work. There is a considerable weight of national and international research evidence which tells us that it doesn't help people manage their money better or look after their children better."

"It is bad social policy because it is very costly. The government will spend over \$4,500 per person per year on Income Management."

"It is bad social policy because it further stigmatises and marginalises people who are really struggling. I call upon the Government to abandon this flawed policy and to put the funding into increasing the skills, resources and infrastructure available for struggling individuals and communities."

"Our organisation is joining many others in the community sector who will not be referring people to income management and is preparing to help vulnerable people defend their rights", concluded Ms Batkin.

Sue Gillett is a Bankstown resident and Aboriginal activist with extensive experience in the child protection and housing sectors:

"Income management does not take into consideration the complex factors that cause disadvantage - in fact it will further entrench disadvantage amongst the most vulnerable people here in Bankstown and all targeted areas."

"We rally tomorrow to mark one of the darkest days in Australia's political history - the announcement of the NT Intervention. We have watched with horror the discrimination being suffered by our brothers and sisters in the NT and can not stand back while this system expands."

"Stronger Futures promises only another decade of discrimination - but we are preparing a boycott campaign here in Bankstown to force a change of direction from a government that has refused to listen", concluded Mrs Gillett.

Rally organised by the Say No to Government Income Management Campaign Coalition and Stop the Intervention Collective Sydney

12pm Saturday June 16
Paul Keating Park, Bankstown

For comment contact:

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Rally speakers include:

George Pascoe, Maningrida community spokesperson

Pam Batkin, Say No to Government Income Management Campaign Coalition

Prof. Larissa Behrendt, Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, UTS

Representatives from the Australian Services Union and Public Sector Association