

HSC Aboriginal Studies

HSC Major Work

By Daniel O'Shea

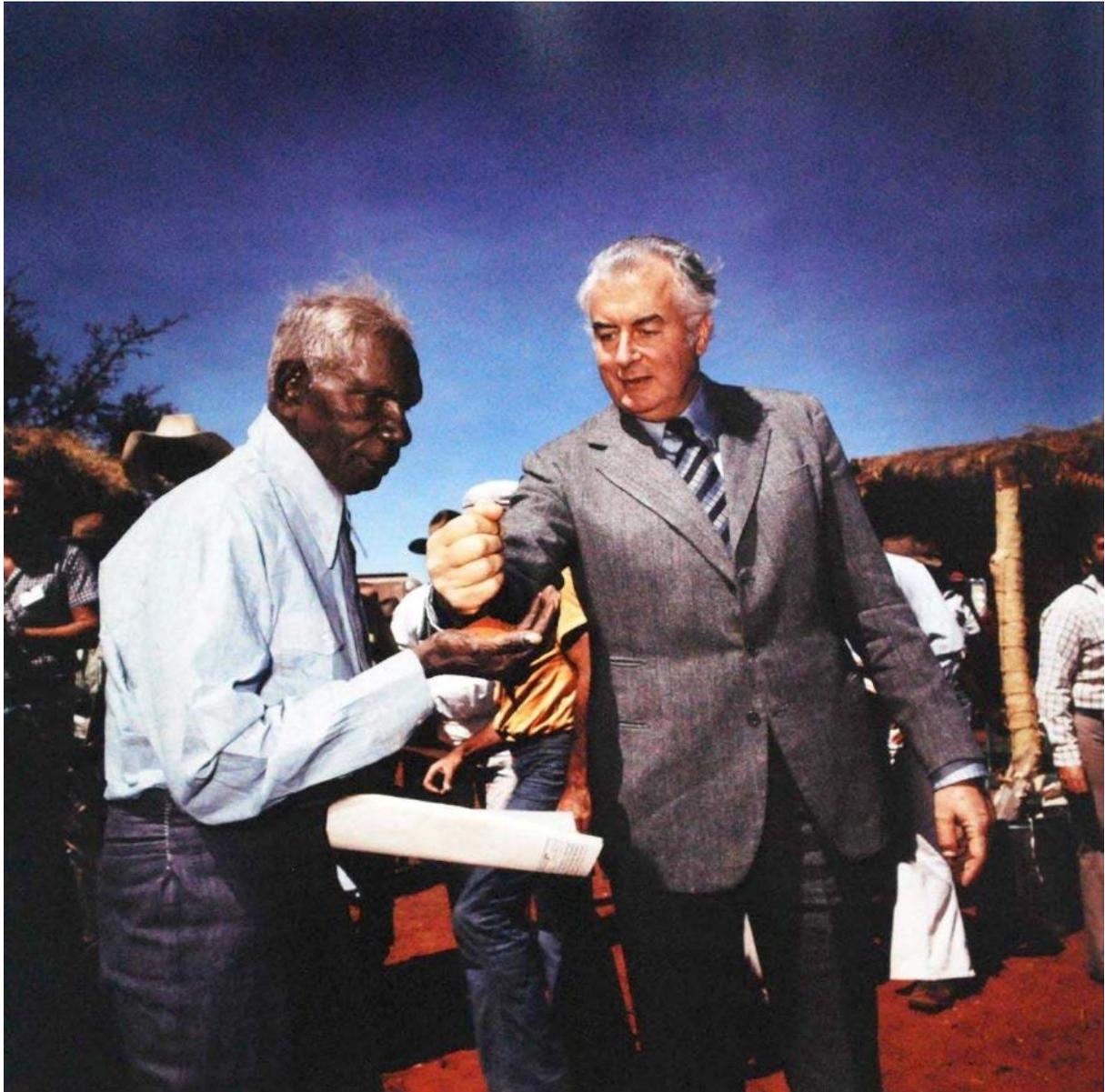
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Report

Investigate whether Australian Government policies been successful in achieving their aims of reducing social exclusion in the Australian First Nations community.

By Daniel O'Shea

22.05.20



“I take it that we are all agreed and that I have your consent?” said Captain Fremantle, nodding to the Nyungar men who stood motionless, staring blankly at him.

- Doris Pilkington, *The Rabbit Proof Fence*

An Investigation on the Effectiveness of Australian Government Policies regarding Indigenous Social Exclusion

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Acknowledgement of Country

The author wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation and their Elders past and present. Acknowledgement and respect are given towards their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of Sydney and this region.

Abstract

Social Exclusion, especially within the context of Indigenous Australia remains at the forefront of discussion regarding the causality and ramifications of contemporary Indigenous Disadvantage, and all the socioeconomic issues stemming from it. The definition of Social Exclusion, for the purposes of this document, is that offered by the UK Cabinet Office which reads as follows:

“A shorthand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown”

The concept of Social Exclusion relates to Australia through the disadvantage that is present in the country. For example, when all facets of Indigenous Disadvantage are considered, including health, social justice, human rights, spiritual rights and land rights, Social Exclusion almost perfectly captures the entire scope of the Disadvantage, and thus serves as a useful benchmark when investigating government policies concerning it. Hence, government Policies which aim to fix Indigenous Disadvantage in one way or another can likewise be said to be improving one aspect of Social Exclusion for communities suffering from Disadvantage. This report aims to investigate the success of programs by Australian governments through the lens of Social Exclusion, and how effective the programs have been in achieving their goals.

Research conducted will investigate the effectiveness in combatting Social Exclusion of a variety of government programs, including the Closing the Gap campaign, the Northern Territory National Emergency Response and the Cashless Welfare system. The investigative conclusions for each program will be included in their respective text, and summarily within the concluding paragraph.

A Case Study is included for both the Closing the Gap and NTNER sections of the report respectively, however as the Income Management Program does not *exclusively* affect Indigenous people, a case study is not included owing to a lack of necessity within the context of this report, as determined by the authors.

Closing the Gap

Closing the Gap is an Australian Government policy framework which aims to achieve equality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in a variety of areas (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2016) . Closing the Gap relates to the idea of Social Exclusion by outlining a framework by which the Australian Government has attempted rectify Indigenous Disadvantage in areas including health, education and employment.



Prime Minister Kevin Rudd Delivers the Apology Speech to Parliament

The Closing the Gap Campaign was first introduced by the Rudd Labor Government following a social justice campaign by an Indigenous non-profit group known as Close the Gap (Healthinfontet, n.d.). Close the Gap put a series of recommendations to the Council of Australian Governments who developed a framework to stop Indigenous Disadvantage within Australia. The intent to “close the gap” was unveiled by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd as part of his February 2008 Apology speech, and later codified with the *Close the Gap Statement of Intent*, a formal agreement between the government of the day and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives to close the gap (Gardiner-Garden, 2014) . From the outset, the Closing the Gap framework had a series of clearly defined goals to be achieved in relation to Indigenous Disadvantage which, unlike many government policies, were actually formulated with Indigenous consultation in mind. The seven Closing the Gap targets related to: Life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, literacy and numeracy proficiency, Year 12 attainment, school attendance and employment outcomes (Haughton, 2017).

Initial reception to the Closing the Gap framework was positive, with many feeling that the previous Howard government had been anti-Indigenous to some extent, with the former Prime Minister making claims regarding Indigenous cultural genocide, or rather its lack of existence (Davidson, 2014) and the declaration of the Northern Territory National Emergency Response (Thorpe, 2016), which will be discussed later in this document. Combined with the emotional power of the Apology, the Rudd Labor government had produced a strong, positive platform for gathering Indigenous support, with the first-term Prime Minister having immediately laid out the most ambitious plan for rectifying Indigenous Disadvantage in Australian history through the Closing the Gap campaign.

As time progressed, however, it soon became apparent that the Closing the Gap campaign was not meeting its targets. Indeed, in 2018, a full decade after the framework was first introduced, only two of the seven Closing the Gap targets had been met, those being access to early childhood education and Year 12 attainment (National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2020).



Progress on the Closing the Gap Target; 2018

The Australian Human Rights Commission stated in a 2018 review that “the *Close the Gap Statement of Intent* has to date only been partially and incoherently implemented via the *Closing the Gap Strategy*”, the review continues with findings that many aspects of the strategy were never properly funded, and thus could not function as intended. The review also criticised how the government was trying to meet its health targets, arguing that the framework targeted only specific diseases and health issues such as alcohol abuse and smoking using “band-aid” solutions, instead of tackling Indigenous health disadvantage on a systemic level.

The proverbial “Gap” remains striking in nearly all areas of contemporary Indigenous Disadvantage. For instance, 2019 data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows an approximate 20% gap in Year 10 attendance rates, 25% gap in students who meet the minimum testing standards for NAPLAN and perhaps most importantly an almost 14 year gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in some areas, all as illustrated by figures 1.1-3.

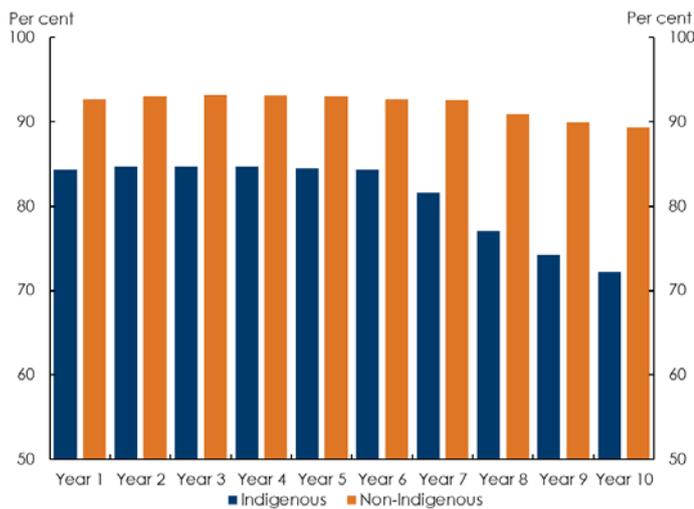


Figure 1.1 - School Attendance Rates; Semester 1, 2019

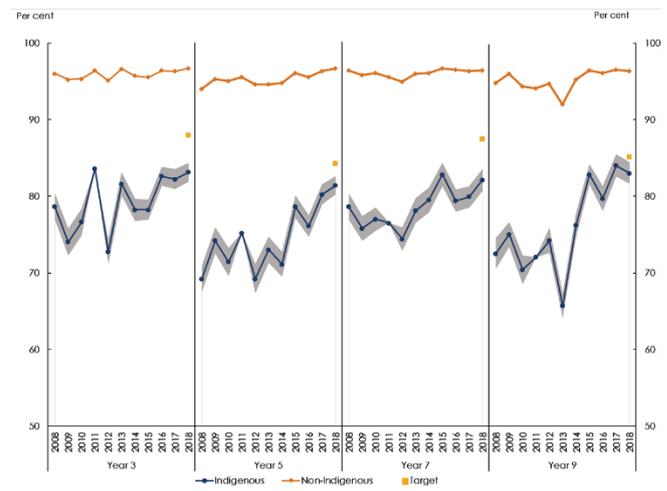


Figure 1.2 - Percentage of Students at or Above National Minimum Testing Standards for Numeracy; 2008-18

LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH, Remoteness Areas - 2015-2017(a)

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	Non-Indigenous	Difference between non-Indigenous and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy at birth(b)
MALES			
Major Cities	72.1	80.7	8.6
Inner and Outer Regional	70.0	79.1	9.1
Remote and Very Remote	65.9	79.7	13.8
FEMALES			
Major Cities	76.5	83.7	7.2
Inner and Outer Regional	74.8	82.8	8.0
Remote and Very Remote	69.6	83.6	14.0

Figure 1.3 – Australian Life Expectancies by Aboriginality and Location; Dates as Above

The 2019 Closing the Gap Report, being released 10 years after the *Statement of Intent* was the final Closing the Gap Report to use the 2008 framework. With the gap still being prevalent in many areas of Indigenous Disadvantage and only two targets being met, it would not be a stretch to say that the strategy, as it was originally envisioned, has failed. In the foreword of the 2019 report, however, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced that the Closing the Gap campaign would be continuing (the *Closing the Gap Refresh*), with new targets being developed in consultation with Indigenous communities and Australian governments in a manner so that “all governments share accountability for progress, and extending this shared accountability to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.” (National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2020)

It would appear then that the Prime Minister is hinting towards a greater emphasis on Indigenous accountability towards the achievement of the targets, a profound contrast to Labor's vision for Closing the Gap, which emphasised the role of the Federal Government in combatting Indigenous Disadvantage through an array of programs and policies outlined in subsequent legislation. July 2019 saw the establishment of the National Indigenous Australians Agency within the portfolio of Minister for Indigenous Australians Ken Wyatt (Dept. of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2016). The Agency largely exists to implement the Government's Closing the Gap initiatives and other Indigenous reconciliation policies (Dept. of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2016). Specifically, an Executive Order signed by the Governor General on the 29th May 2019 outlines the following responsibilities of the Agency:

- to lead and coordinate Commonwealth policy development, program design and implementation and service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- to provide advice to the Prime Minister and the Minister for Indigenous Australians on whole-of-government priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- to lead and coordinate the development and implementation of Australia's Closing the Gap targets in partnership with Indigenous Australians; and
- to lead Commonwealth activities to promote reconciliation.

Another significant event regarding the *Refresh* was a joint announcement between COAG, the National Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations and the Australian Local Government Association. This announcement declared the existence of the *Closing the Gap Partnership Agreement*, which "recognises that shared decision making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, through their representative organisations, in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Closing the Gap framework is essential to closing the gap in life outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians." (Council of Australian Governments, 2019)

The emphasis on Indigenous inclusion within discussions surrounding Closing the Gap is clear with the 2019 *Refresh*, however while the new framework is taking a different approach to its predecessor, it remains to be seen whether it will be any more effective in achieving its targets. Thus far, the 2020 *Closing the Gap Report* has revealed little change from the 2019 report; only two of the original seven targets have been achieved and the Gap across the socioeconomic spectrum of disadvantage remains profound and absolute. It is the hope of the Morrison government that the new framework platform will yield better results than its 2008 contemporary, and if noticeable achievement is seen it would certainly help combat the anti-Indigenous views commonly associated with Coalition governments. (National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2020)

Summary

At the time of writing, it would not be invalid to state that Closing the Gap has failed, at least when taken at face value. It has been unable to meet its targets over an extended timeframe, and while the cause of this shortcoming is a convoluted and multi-faceted beast, the fact remains that Social Exclusion still disproportionately affects Indigenous Australians when contrasted to the rest of the country. However, it should be noted that Closing the Gap has completely shifted the narrative on contemporary Indigenous Disadvantage. From the

proclamation of Kevin Rudd's apology through to the *Refresh*, there has been a greater burden on Australian governments to right the wrongs of past incumbents of their institutions than at any other point in Australian history; a political shift which should not be ignored. Summarily, Closing the Gap is program that was borne out of good intentions, but one that is yet to realise its own aspirations. A decade of shortfalls has cast a shadow of doubt on the ability of the current Morrison Government to steer the ship back on course, and it remains to be seen whether a new approach with increased emphasis on Indigenous consultation and accountability will alleviate the worries many have for the framework which has come to define Australian Indigenous policy.

An Indigenist Approach: *Closing the Gap* Case Study

Australian Indigenous Policy has long been criticised for its lack community consultation, and Closing the Gap is no different. Technocratic, top-down and stratified have all been words that have come to be associated with Indigenous Public Policy within Australia, and the above text include analyses of attempts to rectify this issue. However, one notable example of governments attempting to include Indigenous people in discussions surrounding policies which affect them is the recent NSW Closing the Gap Consultation Program.

Starting in 2019 as part of the new *Closing the Gap Refresh*, the NSW Government has begun an extensive consultation program requesting community input on a new "National Agreement on Closing the Gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians". Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Don Harwin stated that 29 community consultations took place from October 2019, with the NSW Government "seeking feedback from Aboriginal communities about the key targets and priorities for the Closing the Gap refresh."

"Listening to the community on important policy areas like health, education and justice is so important – I look forward to receiving direct feedback from Aboriginal communities so NSW is heard loud and clear at the national level,"

The NSW Aboriginal Land Council explained that consultations had "delved into the three main Priority Action areas: to develop structures to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people embed their expertise to Close the Gap; build Aboriginal community-controlled service sectors to deliver services; and ensure mainstream agencies undertake structural transformation to contribute to Closing the Gap."

The approach shown in NSW is one of the best of a series of Indigenous-inclusive policy consultation programs being implemented across Australia through the Closing the Gap Refresh. Indigenous inclusion in the development policies which solely affect them is not only moral, but is justified by the fact that many of the non-Indigenous institutions which rely on European, neoliberal values that form the foundation for Australia's governmental system experience difficulty in interpreting and understanding Indigenous spiritual law, customs and Dreaming into their decision-making process. While this in itself is not a sign of any fundamental flaw with the system, including First-Nations Peoples in governmental processes will help with the development of Indigenous policies which actually benefit Indigenous Peoples. So, what NSW has accomplished is a good start, but it is time for the rest of Australia to begin valuing Indigenous input as well.

The Northern Territory National Emergency Response

The *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007* was an Act of Parliament introduced by the Howard government during their last term in office which aimed to address child sexual abuse in the Northern Territory, in response to the *Little Children are Sacred* Report which, at least in the opinion of the Government, exposed “paedophile rings” and “widespread sexual abuse” in the Northern Territory. The NTNER relates to the concept of Social Exclusion through its impacts on crime, employment, education, economic wellbeing and the health of rural Indigenous communities.

The NTNER adopted a militaristic approach to dealing with the purported issue of child abuse in the Territory, with the then Minister for Indigenous Affairs commenting that the Government’s goal was to “stabilise, normalise and exit Aboriginal communities” (Brough, 2007) and the Government declaring it to be a “national emergency” (Howard, 2007). The Intervention, as it came to be known by Indigenous communities affected by it, introduced a series of measures under the guise of stopping child abuse, including but not limited to:

- removed the permit system for access to Aboriginal land,
- abolished government-funded Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP),
- subjected Aboriginal children to teaching in a language they don't speak for the first four hours at school,
- quarantined 50% of welfare payments,
- suspended the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA),
- expected Aboriginal people to lease property to the government in return for basic services,
- compulsorily acquired Aboriginal land and
- subjected Aboriginal children to mandatory health checks without consulting their parents, and against the sacred oath of doctors

Source: Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) - "The Intervention" - Creative Spirits, retrieved from <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/northern-territory-emergency-response-intervention>

As well as tackling child abuse, some other goals of the NTNER were to stop alcohol abuse, stop the viewing of pornography, reforming the welfare system, improving school attendance and “reforming community living arrangements” via the forcible acquisition of entire townships and ensuring that

“Community members on income support will be required to participate in community cleanups and basic cleanups of public housing on a 'Work for the Dole basis”
(Brough, 2007).

This militaristic mindset and mantra of “stabilise, normalise and exit” became an infamous symbol of the Intervention, and was upheld when members of the military, Australian Federal Police and Northern Territory Police “occupied” rural Indigenous communities with very small populations. *The Age* reports:

*“Reconnaissance teams and **troops** will today start rolling into central Australian communities... The teams will enter about five settlements over coming days, including Mutitjulu at Uluru”*
(Australian Associated Press, 2007)

The Indigenous reception to the sudden arrival of military personnel was reportedly negative, with *The Age* continuing: “Some Aboriginal families are reported to have fled their homes and sought refuge in the bush amid fears their children could be removed.” Aboriginal people living within the communities affected by the Intervention even likened it to being

*“our **Holocaust**”*
(Australian Associated Press, 2007)

Another aspect of the NTNER which received backlash was the legislation itself. While the government insisted that the NTNER was to protect children and expose paedophilia in Indigenous communities, not once in the hundreds of pages within the Act are the words “child” or “children” mentioned (Korff, 2020). Instead, a word-cloud produced by Creative Spirits, an Indigenous non-profit illustrates that “land” “point” and “area” are the most commonly used words throughout the document, excluding grammatical terms and articles (Korff, 2020). Indeed, one of the main reasons cited by the government for enacting the Intervention was the existence of “paedophile rings” operating within Northern Territory remote Indigenous communities. While the rates of child sex abuse are significantly higher amongst Aboriginal communities when compared to the rest of the country (an Aboriginal child in 2009 was seven times more likely to be the victim of sexual crimes than their non-Indigenous counterparts) Creative Spirits argues that “child abuse is not driven by desire” rather,

*“The immediate cause seems to be a cocktail of boredom, poverty, alcohol abuse and resulting **violence** when the offender is of mature age.”*
(Korff, 2019)

The *Little Children are Sacred Report* appears to support this notion, stating that “generations of social problems” are pivotal in rates of child sexual abuse (Wild; Anderson, 2007). The *Koori Mail* argues that many environmental factors contribute to child sexual abuse, not necessarily paedophilic desire itself, naming the following as important factors:

- overcrowding of houses
- limited education
- boredom
- easy access to drugs and pornography
- limited understanding of European ways due to English being a third or fourth language
- frustration and helplessness
- parental neglect
- government neglect
- childhood sexualisation (exposure to graphic pornography at a very young age)
- no or limited sexual education

Source: Aboriginal sexual abuse - Creative Spirits, retrieved from
<https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/health/aboriginal-sexual-abuse>

All of these claims seem to directly contradict the Government's narrative of large-scale Aboriginal paedophile rings being the main perpetrator of child sex abuse.

Furthermore, even though the Intervention was declared in response to the *Little Children are Sacred Report*, only 2 of the report's 97 recommendations for combatting child sexual abuse in Northern Territory communities were actually implemented in the NTNER, leading some parties to conclude that the NTNER was nothing more than a "land grab" to help mining companies gain easier access to Aboriginal Native Title lands. (Korff, 2020)

In regards to whether the NTNER was effective in achieving its goals, the CASTAN Centre for Human Rights Law produced a 2015 report evaluating the effectiveness of the NTNER using the Closing the Gap framework, producing a score out of ten for each of the seven areas contained within it. The NTNER achieved a score lower than 5/10 in six areas, with education receiving 6/10. It is the opinion of the report that the NTNER has not been effective in most wide-ranging metrics, such as employment and economic participation, education, health and life expectancy, safer communities and incarceration rates. However, in regards to alcohol abuse, the report notes that "per capita alcohol consumption has fallen steadily since 2005" and that the bans on alcohol consumption in regional communities have "caused the annual supply of alcohol to drop by 2.5% each year" (Gray; Allan; Austin; Banach-Wightman; Brooks; Calleja; Clapp; Di Natale; Dobbyn; Dowling; Francis; Frode; Hugo; Jenkin; Olivares-Jones; Narendren; Henderson; Keller; Lettau; Long; Lynch; Moore; Sacher; Tan, 2020). Yet, the report remarks that the NT is 30% above the national average in alcohol consumption, and that the bans have been circumvented by Indigenous communities who have been using home distillation and illicit alcohol trafficking to ensure that a supply still reaches communities (Gray *et al*, 2020).

Summary

The Northern Territory National Emergency Response was truly a turning point in Indigenous policy. In years prior, governments had been making strides forward in regards to Indigenous liberty, with the 1967 referendum and Aboriginal land rights being recognised, Indigenous Peoples were beginning to recover from the horrors inflicted upon them during previous years. Yet, the NTNER was declared and thus began one of the

"worst policies inflicted on Aboriginal people" (Korff, 2020) which would have *"consequences that will have repercussions for generations"* (Korff, 2020).

In nearly all areas, the NTNER failed. School attendance did not increase, youth suicide and self-harm saw a dramatic rise, housing remained overcrowded and "extreme rates of family violence" did not decrease. In regards to Social Exclusion, with all the above taken into account, it is a fair statement to acknowledge that the NTNER did little to no good for Indigenous communities. The Apology, given by Kevin Rudd a year after the NTNER was first declared marked a cruel juxtaposition where a government was apologising for past atrocities, while arguably being complicit in one that is still ongoing.

An Australian Utopia: NTNER Case Study

The NTNER is a policy which was implemented across the Northern Territory and is, for the most part believed to have had largely negative effects on Indigenous populations, with many regional communities experiencing the worst of the lot. However, there is one community which, through maintaining strong Spiritual Connection to Country and a reliance on traditional Aboriginal medicine and food, has been in a uniquely advantaged position when referring to the NTNER. Utopia, Northern Territory is a small, unincorporated township in the very remote portion of the Northern Territory, and is nearly entirely composed of Indigenous populations, living on Native Title freehold lands and outstations and had a population of nearly 1200 in 2011. Owing to its remoteness, the town does not receive adequate services in many areas, and has been described by SBS as a “3rd world country in a 1st world country”.

Hence, when the NTNER was implemented Territory-wide, it would be logical to assume that the negative effects of this policy would have been magnified to some extent. However, this narrative does not hold true for those in Utopia. Firstly, while the rest of the Northern Territory, especially Indigenous communities; have a high level of reliance on Government allowances and Centrelink payments, the Local Government Area of Central Desert, within which Utopia resides, records 96% of its population being reliant on “employee income as main source of income” and while the median annual income for Central Desert is far below that of the national average at \$25 168 (excluding government allowances), a lack of reliance on government is an important step towards a goal of decolonisation and reconciliation within Australian Indigenous communities. Logically, some of the more disastrous policies of the NTNER such as the Income Management Program (refer to page 10) did not see as much of an impact in Utopia, owing to the Government’s lack of influence over personal finance in the region.

Furthermore, the NTNER’s programs regarding alcoholism and drug abuse were not needed in Utopia as Aboriginal residents of the town actually experience far lower rates of alcohol abuse and drug dependencies than the rest of Indigenous Australia, a result of what is thought to be a closer Connection to Country and greater reliance on “bush tucker” among other hallmarks of a traditional Indigenous lifestyle, which would be difficult to pursue outside of very remote, Indigenous-controlled regions such as Central Desert.

Even though Utopia is undoubtedly a disadvantaged community, behind the unflattering statistics lies a community which has stayed true to its roots. Real Connection to Country is still present here, and this reliance on traditional ways has given real hope towards a case that Indigenous Peoples, when permitted to practice their culture, use their medicines and gather their food, can persevere beyond the societal traps which so often befall disadvantaged communities, and make policies like the NTNER redundant.

The Income Management Scheme

As part of the NTNER, the Income Management Scheme was introduced for the first time in Australian history to exclusively Aboriginal welfare recipients within the Northern Territory. On this scheme, 50% of an individual's welfare payment was "Quarantined" on their BasicsCard, with this quarantined money only being usable at certain government approved retailers which met strict classificatory standards (*Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007*).

The Income Management Scheme fits into the notion of Social Exclusion by affecting the economic and social health of disproportionately Indigenous people, compounding inherent disadvantage with socioeconomic underprivilege.

Since the Intervention, the Rudd-Gillard, Turnbull and Morrison governments have been trialling an altered version of the scheme for welfare recipients of all backgrounds, with the Cashless Welfare program being trialled in certain areas of NSW and Victoria. In 2019, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced his government's intentions to roll out the cashless welfare card, now known as the Indue card, nationwide for all welfare recipients. While the intention to roll out the program nationwide had already been discussed by the previous Labor government, Morrison took the first proper legislative steps towards a nationwide rollout, with the emendation of the *Social Security Administration Act 1999* to begin trials in certain regions. Importantly, while the Act originally included a sunset clause for the Income Management Scheme, the Parliament has consistently voted to extend the lifetime of the Scheme, and thus the automatic abrogation for the clause has been continually pushed back.



The Indue Income Management Card; 2016

The Cashless Welfare system, also known as the BasicsCard, the Cashless Welfare Card and now the Indue card is a system designed to control where welfare recipients can spend their money, by limiting the ability to spend welfare payments on drugs, alcohol and gambling.

The card was originally intended to support the alcohol restrictions put in place by NTNER measures, and as such was used in regional NT communities where it replaced ordinary Centrelink payments.

However, the only evidence that supports the card as being effective in curbing alcohol and drug dependencies has come from the government itself, and third party NGOs such as the Saint Vincent de Paul foundation have argued that supporting data for the cards is anecdotal, skewed and unreliable. 85% of female BasicsCard users said the card did not change their spending habits, 74% commented that the card did not help them look after their family and 70% said they did not feel safer since income management was introduced. Indeed, a majority of card users involved in the goldfield trials reported no change in their drinking,

gambling or drug using habits and most people involved in the trial had no alcohol, gambling or drug dependencies to begin with. Furthering the community consensus regarding the Scheme, a 2014 report found that there was “no substantive evidence of the program having significant changes relative to its key policy objectives, including changing people's behaviours (Bray, Gray, Hand, Katz, 2014)” the report concludes with

*“taken as a whole, there is **no** evidence to indicate that income management has any effects at the community level, nor that income management, in itself, facilitates long-term behavioural change” (Bray et al, 2014).*

The academic trend in dissatisfaction with the Scheme is also mirrored within the public view. For instance, The Guardian, writing on the new Indue Card intended to be rolled out nationwide stated the following:

“‘Stigma, Shame and Frustration.’ Cashless Welfare does more harm than good.”

This sentiment continues throughout the article, with another line highlighting

“Researchers say those forced onto the controversial income management have ‘overwhelmingly number’ of negative experiences”

Empirically, the overwhelming response to the card has been negative, with those few people in favour being associated with either government or Indue itself. Indeed, the inspiration for the program purportedly came mining billionaire Andrew Forrest’s article on increasing income management in Australia. Furthermore, for every one person put on the Program, the government pays Indue \$12 000 taxpayer dollars, whereas Newstart in itself costs \$14 000; essentially doubling the cost without actually increasing the amount of money available to spend for recipients. It is also relevant under the premise of this report to mention that the former Director of Indue, Larry Anthony is now the president of the Nationals: the main political advocate for the Indue Income Management Program.

Jamie Parker, the member for Balmain within the NSW State Parliament is also heavily critical of the scheme, stating in a 2020 interview that he opposes it because

“That mission mentality is now being extended to the cashless welfare card which says we don't trust you, you can't do anything yourself, we have to control everything about your daily existence because we don't trust you. And that's the what is the antithesis of a modern liberal democracy.”

Another theme Mr. Parker touches on is the apparently hypocritical nature of government MPs, who write laws regarding the management of welfare recipients’ income:

“It's interesting they talk about gambling and drinking and prostitution. Well, you know, if they wanted to stop it, they should be stopping a lot of MP's salaries and a lot of MPs, spend a lot of money on booze and probably prostitution. And I know a lot of them gamble. I mean, it's just so outrageous that they had to suspend the Racial Discrimination Act.”

The Income Management Scheme is one of the more controversial policies in the sphere of contemporary Indigenous public policy. It has been criticized for its empirical lack of effectiveness, the sense of inferiority it conveys to its holders and an uncomfortable political arrangement relating to Indue’s ties to major political parties and government. It remains to be seen whether the government will follow through with its plan for a nationwide rollout,

and whether Australia will accept that decision. The Income Management Program's impacts on Social Exclusion have been invasive in nature, by increasing a feeling of alienation felt by those affected by the Scheme, thus the Income Management Scheme, in all its manifestations has largely been an abject failure.

Findings

Indigenous public policy has been part of the Australian political landscape since those first boats docked in Port Jackson, and the strange "ghosts" set foot into their new domain. For most of its history, Indigenous Peoples were seen as unequal in the eyes of the law, and while the legal disparities in rights, social justice and freedom has ceased to exist, the societal ramifications of centuries-long systemic trauma and racism has not. Hence, Australian government policies of the modern era need to account for these historical injustices and acknowledge the Connection to Country which remains at the centre of contemporary Indigenous wellbeing. This report has attempted to investigate, and hence evaluate, the effectiveness of contemporary Indigenous Public Policy through the lens of Social Exclusion, which remains defined as per proceeding sections of this report.

The Closing the Gap program was heralded by many as a turning point for the better in the world of Indigenous Public Policy. An emotional Apology delivered by Kevin Rudd was the perfect accompaniment to the announcement of a social justice campaign which aimed to finish Indigenous disadvantage for good. However, the program has faced a plethora of trials and tribulations throughout its existence, hindering its ability to carry out the dramatic social change demanded by its constituent legislation. Successive reports continually proved that targets were not being met, and a heavily criticised funding regime was thought by many to have seriously impaired if not made impossible the prospects for achieving the goals of Closing the Gap. This report has found that Closing the Gap has not succeeded in any meaningful way within the context of Social Exclusion, *and* the inherent targets against which Closing the Gap progress has been measured for most of its existence. To repeat the sentiment stated in above paragraphs, "the Gap across the socioeconomic spectrum of disadvantage remains profound and absolute", and it is unclear for how long this trend is set to continue. However, the report did note that Closing the Gap, especially in recent years, has provided a platform for Indigenous involvement in politics, with both the federal government (by means of NIAA) and the NSW government implementing community consultation measures within policy writing, finally recognising the importance of Indigenous consultation on policies which affect them, and how this consultation heavily correlates with the effectiveness of these policies in achieving their goals.

Another point regarding Closing the Gap which the report believes to be relevant is the apparent shift on political sentiment regarding Indigenous Peoples and how they are treated. Prior to Closing the Gap, there was no real Indigenous social justice movement within the public sphere of influence, save for the land rights movement in decades prior. Closing the Gap has since been the first contemporary piece of Indigenous policy to bring social justice and equitability discussions regarding Aboriginal and Torres-Strait Islander Peoples into the public debate, and that is a feat whose importance cannot be understated.

With the above considered, the report makes the final conclusion that Closing the Gap has been an abject failure in nearly all metrics that it is defined with, yet has had meaningful political and cultural impact by shifting the narrative of Indigenous Disadvantage, and broadening understanding of the topic to the entirety of Australia.

The Northern Territory National Emergency response has been, and continues to be, one of the single most controversial policies enacted by any Australian government. A suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act, the deployment of the military within Australian borders and a whole host of criticism has earned the NTNER such titles as “our Holocaust”. Beginning and ending with a militaristic sentiment at its core, the NTNER bore a striking resemblance to previous colonial-era policing of Indigenous peoples, and this manifested in fears among Indigenous Peoples regarding a repetition of the Stolen Generations among other atrocities. The alcohol ban, while successful in slightly lowering per-capita alcohol consumption within Indigenous communities, has yet to close the 30% lead that the NT has on other states in regards to alcohol consumption, and an epidemic of illegal distillation operations on Indigenous homelands has come to from , among illicit trafficking, an alternate supply for alcohol-dependent Indigenous Peoples.

In regards to the justification given for the NTNER, that being “widespread child sex abuse” the report has failed to see any evidence of this occurring *in the manner* that was described by the government. Whilst child sex abuse rates are abhorrently high in Aboriginal communities, these crimes are not borne out of paedophilic desire as described by the government, but rather as a result of compounding disadvantageous environmental factors within communities which lack the physical and emotional infrastructure to deal with them. Indeed, the report which the NTNER was declared in response to, the *Little Children are Sacred* report had only two of its ninety-three recommendations implemented by the NTNER, with the legislation focusing heavily on “land” “area” and “point” whilst failing to mention the word “child” once. These facts have led many to believe that the NTNER exists purely to facilitate mining operations on previously inaccessible Aboriginal Lands.

The report concludes that the NTER has been a complete failure in the completion of its objectives both through its own inherent framing and that of Social Exclusion, save for a slight decrease in alcohol consumption in remote communities.

The Income Management Program, initially formed as an offshoot of the NTER, has grown to dominate the discussion on welfare and entitlements from 2019 onwards. The program has received heavy criticism from a variety of parties including NGOs, community members and politicians. In regards to Indigenous communities, the report has found that the Scheme as implemented in the Northern Territory has not obtained any of its goals of decreasing Social Exclusion, and instead promotes it by alienating the cardholders from the rest of society, instead of integrating them as has been proven to be the most effective way through which Social Exclusion can be combatted. Citing the above paragraphs, 85% of female BasicsCard users said the card did not change their spending habits, 74% commented that the card did not help them look after their family and 70% said they did not feel safer since income management was introduced. This alone signifies the lack of effectiveness in terms of empirical data that the Scheme has demonstrated throughout all of its reiterations. It is the conclusion of the report that the Income Management Scheme has not been effective in any metric, including its own inherent targets and those of Social Exclusion as outlined by this report.

In conclusion, the report has found that the three contemporary Indigenous public policies of Closing the Gap, the Northern Territory National Emergency Response and the Income Management Scheme have not been successful in achieving their own inherent goals, nor those of reducing Social Exclusion. These policies have, save for few exceptions, been abject failures and have in many cases magnified the Social Exclusion which they were attempting to rectify in the first place. It remains to be seen whether meaningful change will occur in regards to Indigenous Policy in coming years, yet it is the recommendation of the report that the voices of Indigenous Peoples be heard when developing policy which affects them, and that we finally, *truly*, acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we stand.

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