

FIXING DYSFUNCTIONALITY TOGETHER

Like my friend Marcia Langton I am appalled at the recent Queensland court judgement for six juveniles and three men convicted of raping a ten year old girl. This should never have been allowed to happen anywhere in Australia. I have a ten year old daughter myself and if this had happened to my family I would be fighting and protesting all the way to the United Nations. However, to state that Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) payments amount to government support of such grossly dysfunctional behaviour is not only silly but also shows a lack of appreciation of the benefits the program does bring to many individuals and communities across the country. The CDEP program certainly is in urgent need of reform but to fully suspend it without providing meaningful employment and wage alternatives can potentially cause much deeper problems for innocent Aboriginal women and men. Furthermore, CDEP supports many programs of great benefit to all Australians, such as biodiversity and conservation research and management, climate change studies and the monitoring of remote northern coastlines.

But this is the crux of the 'Intervention' problem: how does Australia fix dysfunctional, broken people and communities without hurting lots of good, hard-working people in the process? How can meaningful employment, decent education and quality healthcare be delivered quickly in mutually satisfactory ways without causing further problems? Ill conceived, knee-jerk solutions like those of the former Howard government and knee-jerk comments like those of Langton can cause more harm than good. And attacking Women (and Men) for Wik, people both raising national/international awareness and working with communities to find best solutions, in a mean spirited, unjustified way does nothing to help anyone. I proudly support Women for Wik and do not cowardly hide behind the skirt of anyone, female or male (I do have some Scottish ancestry).

One of the reasons I support Women for Wik is because they stand up for basic human rights, basic Australian rights. And they listen to community elders, female and male, from affected communities. Let's stop the fighting and work together. Australia's indigenous people deserve better than political dummy spits. This is a national problem, a national disgrace. Although tough measures will have to be applied, including some that Langton has suggested, they need to be as fair and balanced to the needs of all indigenous Australians as we can make them. This will require a huge effort on the part of all Australians, starting with an end to soft and hard bigotry. Unfortunately, outrageous court judgements compound the problem and demonstrate that the profound injustice that has for far too long afflicted the Australia's indigenous peoples continues today.

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