

Our Ref: GEN033
Your Ref: NA
Office: Perth
Date: 23 October 2020

To: Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Attn: Committee Secretary
C/-: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

REF: Response to the "Inquiry into the Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Continuation of Cashless Welfare) Bill 2020"

Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation (YMAC) is the Native Title Representative Body (NTRB) for what are described as the Pilbara and Geraldton regions of Western Australia. YMAC is run by an Aboriginal Board of Directors, representing several native title groups (each of whom have their own language, culture, traditions and protocols). YMAC provides a range of services, including native title claim and future act representation, heritage services, community and economic development assistance, and natural resource management support.

YMAC takes this opportunity to reaffirm its strong opposition, on behalf of its Board of Directors and the Pilbara Traditional Owners in attendance at the 2017 Annual On-Country Bush Meeting at Yule River, to the Commonwealth Government's continued imposition of income management and cashless welfare measures, specifically its "Cashless Debit Card" (CDC).

The Commonwealth Government's latest decision to remove the trial parameters and establish the CDC as an ongoing program is of great concern to YMAC. Despite ongoing lack of conclusive, accepted empirical data or evidence to support the government's conclusions that these initiatives are solving the issues claimed to be associated with welfare dependence, it continues to progress this paternalistic agenda. Such action ignores the myriad growing criticisms and concerns raised by community members, as well as not-for-profit, non-government, academic/research and other organisations. For example, and by no means limited to, the following submissions provided in relation to the committee's 2019 inquiry:

- Northern Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (Submission 105)
- Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (Submission 20)
- Indigenous Peoples' Organisation (Submission 51)
- Australian Human Rights Commission (Submission 9)
- Australian Council of Social Service (Submission 41)
- Human Rights Law Centre (Submission 46)
- Professor Jon Altman and Dr Francis Markham, ANU (Submission 88)
- Professor Matthew Gray and Dr Rob Bray PSM, ANU (Submission 1)
- Dr Janet Hunt, ANU (Submission 2)

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YMAC has sought direct feedback on this matter from the communities it serves. In particular, it is clear Aboriginal people in the Pilbara do not support this program: Their strong opposition was reflected in the related resolution passed by those Traditional Owners present at the 2017 Annual On-Country Bush Meeting at Yule River¹ – a position which confirmed that already taken by YMAC's Board of Directors².

As YMAC has previously stated: "cash management does not transform welfare dependence". If anything, it is a punitive approach that acts to perpetuate and deepen stigma and frustrates the options available for the people subjected to it. It does not promote self-reliance or self-determination, nor does it effectively attempt to address the underlying causes of economic and social disadvantage. The fundamental issues requiring prioritised attention and reform should involve improving weak economic environments, as well as the availability and accessibility of appropriate social services and programs.

YMAC believes the government's efforts related to the ongoing imposition of income management and cashless welfare measures would be better focused on developing locally-driven solutions that are co-created and implemented in collaboration with the communities they impact; meaningful investments requiring genuine consultation and equitable partnerships, and timeframes beyond government election cycles.

Should this response generate any questions or concerns, please contact Executive Assistant, Dee Way, in YMAC's Perth office on 08 9268 7000, or email dway@ymac.org.au.

Yours sincerely,



Simon Hawkins
Chief Executive Officer

¹ See: <http://ymac.org.au/united-voice-for-pilbara-aboriginal-people/>

² See: <http://ymac.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/170817-YMAC-Board-does-not-support-the-cashless-welfare-card.pdf>