




Speech By
Hon. Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

Record of Proceedings, 18 August 2016

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Reparations Review Panel

 **Hon. CW PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (Treasurer, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships and Minister for Sport) (9.49 am): From the late 19th century and for a large part of the 20th century, in this state governments exercised control over all aspects of the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They were subject to protection acts that included control over their wages and their savings. We have previously recognised that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people suffered direct disadvantage from racially discriminatory government practices of the past, such as stolen wages. As part of that approach, to date more than \$5.8 million in reparations have been paid to more than 3,000 eligible claimants under the government's new \$21 million stolen wages reparation scheme.

Now, in a milestone for this state, we have established a dedicated reparations review panel to ensure that those who are eligible receive reparations. The expert panel has been set up in direct response to the community feedback received during consultation by the Stolen Wages Reparations Taskforce, led by then Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda. The five-member expert panel will reassess claims that were initially deemed ineligible due to a lack of verifiable government records showing whether or not there was government control of a person's wages or savings. The panel is not part of an appeals process. Rather, claims assessed and deemed inconclusive by the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships due to insufficient documentation will be examined by the Reparations Review Panel. This new process gives unsuccessful applicants an opportunity to present oral testimony about their personal experiences and other evidence to support their claims in the absence of formal documentation. Already the panel, which met for the first time earlier this month, has approved two claims as eligible by drawing on personal accounts from individuals, surviving co-workers and knowledge of community life. The Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships is working to fast-track those payments to both eligible claimants, who are now in their eighties.

Those are examples of genuine claims that, without the review panel process, would have otherwise sadly fallen through the cracks due to inconclusive records. Indigenous Queenslanders wronged by previous governments and protection acts should not be further disadvantaged by a lack of record keeping from years gone by. We ought to remove barriers and red tape that discourage eligible Indigenous Queenslanders from progressing their claims to ensure that no-one misses out on their rightful entitlements. This new method for reviewing claims is vital given that, for many Indigenous Queenslanders, there is little or no paper trail of their employment and mistreatment in this often undocumented era in Queensland's history. I believe the establishment of the Reparations Review Panel will deliver justice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders while acknowledging the injustices of the past.