



Response to the “Inquiry into the *Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Income Management and Cashless Welfare) Bill 2019*”

Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation 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”.

The Commonwealth Government’s continued expansion of the “Cashless Debit Card” trials is of great concern to Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation (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.

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 which 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/programs.

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

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>



About Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation

Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation (YMAC) is the Native Title Representative Body for the Pilbara, Murchison, Midwest and Gascoyne regions of Western Australia. YMAC has a representative area of over one-third of the state and represents over 24 native title claims, all with their own language, culture and traditions. YMAC is a not-for-profit organisation run by an Aboriginal Board of Directors and provides a range of services to its members including claim and future-act representation, heritage protection services, community and economic development and natural resource management.

About the Annual On-Country Bush Meetings at Yule River

Meetings held at Yule River are historic and have been organised by Aboriginal people in the Pilbara for decades; the location is seen as a place where people from different language groups can come together to discuss common issues affecting Aboriginal communities across the region. Stemming from the actions taken in the lead up to the 1946 Pilbara Strike, when Aboriginal people held secret meetings in remote bush locations to plan an ambitious three-year walk off by Aboriginal pastoral workers who were living on cattle stations in conditions of virtual slavery, Pilbara Aboriginal people continued in their efforts to advocate for improved conditions and outcomes by organising bush meetings. During the land rights era, from the late-1970s, Yule River became the focal point for such gatherings which were often attended by up to 2,000 Aboriginal people from all over the Pilbara. At this time, "Old Man Parker" (born Herbert), was the Pilbara representative for the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee, the first national body elected by Aboriginal people, and introduced by the Whitlam Government. Mr Parker presided over these meetings on the river's sandy banks as Aboriginal people from all over the Pilbara region gathered to talk about lands trust business, housing complaints, and land rights. Many important initiatives have been borne from Yule River meetings, with both concerns and solutions coming directly from Pilbara Aboriginal people; and with government expected to attend to hear and address their concerns. Through the efforts of then YMAC Co-Chairperson, Mrs Doris Eaton (whose father was a key player in the 1946 Pilbara Strike), and the YMAC Pilbara Regional Committee, the Yule River meetings recommenced in 2014. All language groups from across the region are invited to attend these meetings and share their concerns. Much like they were decades ago, gatherings at Yule River are an important opportunity for a diverse range of Aboriginal voices to be heard.