ADAM GILES
SHADOW MINISTER FOR INDIGENOUS POLICY

MEDIA RELEASE

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REPORT HIGHLIGHTS URGENT NEED FOR SIHIP

The Commonwealth Government’s mid-year report card into the Northern Territory Emergency Response should act as a spur to the Henderson Government to end the bungling and get on with the SIHIP project.

Shadow Indigenous Affairs Minister, Adam Giles, said the report card shows that 73% of children aged less than one are at risk of SIDS due to bed sharing.

The report goes on to re-iterate the role of poor living conditions, overcrowding and poverty in contributing to ear, skin, oral health and physical growth problems.

“It’s against this back-drop that the Henderson Government has spent more than $40million administering the SIHIP project without a single house being built,” Mr Giles said.

“The Henderson Government must get its act together, stop bloating SIHIP with administrators and build houses for Indigenous people without delay. The lack of activity on the ground over the past few months has been unacceptable.”

Mr Giles said the report highlights the urgent need for the intervention to be revitalised by the Commonwealth and Territory governments, which have taken their eyes off the ball when it comes to tackling systemic problems in Indigenous communities.
“The Commonwealth could start by being transparent with the outcomes of its six-monthly reports and not burying them on the FAHCSIA website,” Mr Giles said.

“While outcomes in many areas of the intervention are disappointing to say the least, the community needs to know whether the actions on the ground are matching the Federal Government’s rhetoric.

“Child health checks were running at 74% of the child population within a 15 month period, now they’re running at 33% and, the report says, many children have yet to be seen for referrals from child health checks.

Mr Giles said that while he acknowledged the significant increase in the number of reported child abuse cases in remote Territory communities could be attributed to more police on the ground, the figures were none-the-less disturbing.

“The number went from 66 before the intervention to 227 last financial year but I suspect that figure would be just the tip of the ice-berg across the whole of the Northern Territory.

“The number of convictions for child sexual assault went from 15 before the intervention to 22 last financial year – but the report admits this figure is misleading because the conviction rate would likely understate the actual level of abuse.”

The number of aggravated assaults rose from 187 in 2006-07 to 229 last financial year.

Bringing into focus the Chief Minister’s dubious comments that the Territory already has enough police, the report says only 18 of the 61 police officers deployed to the communities are from the NTPS.

Mr Giles said it was disappointing the Intervention had seen an actual decline in school attendance levels across remote Territory schools – 62.3% to 62.2% – and that primary school enrolment had increased by just 36 – to 5636 – over the past two years.

This is despite population growth in communities significantly higher than the Territory average.

While secondary school enrolments had climbed from 1622 in June 2007 to 2153 in June 2009, it was deeply disturbing that secondary attendances were tracking at just 57.1%.

“The Territory Government has spoken for years about improving attendances, with little result,” Mr Giles said.

“Its failure to make a significant impact on attendances despite the efforts of several Education Ministers indicates the Government has little idea how to
overcome this major hurdle towards improving education standards among remote Territorians.”

The transition from welfare to work continues should be a leading factor in reducing disadvantage in the Territory, but instead the intervention has seen thousands on remote communities transfer from the Newstart Allowance to Disability Support Pension.

“Labor softened the Mutual Obligation framework when it came to power in 2007, encouraging people to stay on welfare rather than work,” Mr Giles said.

“It’s all carrot and no stick.”

Mr Giles said this is re-enforced by looking at the 30% attendance rates for Work for the Dole activities.

“Newstart recipients were supposed to work for their dole but barely anyone turned up suggesting the need for a more balanced punitive approach and a need for a more hands-on role by Commonwealth officials in communities.

Instead the Labor Government cancelled the positions on Community Employment Brokers, the key people who were encouraging economic participation and job creation.

“The Intervention was intended to radically re-shape the lives of Aboriginal people,” Mr Giles said.

“Under Labor, the program is being allowed to die because of a lack of will at both levels of Government.”

Further comment: Adam Giles 0421 588 118