



Australian Women's Coalition

**Darwin
consultation notes**



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INTRODUCTION

The Darwin consultation on the Australia Institute report on the impact of the recession on women was facilitated by Michael Duffy (NT Council of State School Organisations) ,Shane Thamm, the School for Policy and Social Research Charles Darwin University, and the National Foundation for Australian Women,

It was held on 26 October 2009 at the School, and invitations were sent through the School and Mr Duffy to a range of local stakeholders.-attached.

BACKGROUND

Darwin is the capital city of the Northern Territory, a self-governing territory of Australia.

It is 3,391 kms from Sydney, reached by air, or, more recently by rail from Adelaide.

The population of the Territory is now 223079, recording a growth of 2.2%.¹ Net interstate migration in 2009 was 832. Net overseas migration was 641, compared to -47 in the December 2008 quarter. Annual population transience is estimated to be around 8%-10% annually.

The main population centres are Darwin, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine.

About 55% of the population resides in the Darwin statistical district, with the balance spread across the Territory.² In June 2008 the Territory's median age was 31.1 years, there were 101.7 males to every female, 23.8% of the population was under 15 years of age.

Approximately 10% of Darwin's population are indigenous residents, mainly members of the Larrakia Nation. Approximately 10% of the population comprises members and families from the Australian Defence Force.

Darwin has an extremely transient population. Between 2000 and 2006 there was a 46% population turnover.³

The Territory recorded (June 2008) the nation's second highest median gross income, behind the Australian Capital Territory, reflecting the high proportion of the employed population providing Government services. Government pensions

¹ http://www.nt.gov.au/ntt/economics/publications/economic_briefs/population_marqtr09.pdf

² http://www.nt.gov.au/ntt/economics/publications/social_briefs/soc_ind_sept09.pdf

³ <http://www.cdu.edu.au/sspr/documents/Brief2008020DistinguishingDarwin.pdf>

and allowances were the primary income for 15.2% of households, the lowest in the nation, and 84.5% of households had at least one employed person, the highest in the nation.

Aboriginal people make up 30% of the population of the Northern Territory, and 38 of Aboriginal children are under 15 years. The Aboriginal population has a high growth rate, and is distributed between Darwin, 9 main towns and overall 641 individual communities. The majority of the Aboriginal population do not have good access to mainstream services (health, education, housing).

Mining is the most important industry, estimated to produce around a quarter of the Territory's Gross State Product and is responsible for some 2000 jobs. The unemployment rate in July 2009 was approximately 4%. In year on year terms, employment increased by 4.3% in the year to July 2009. These data are highly volatile. Other important economic sectors are retail, pastoralism and tourism. Retail is holding up strongly in the year.

The mining sector is subject to boom and bust conditions- in early 2009 over 400 jobs were lost, in part as a result of increasing efficiencies in the mining operations, in part because of downturns in overseas demand for specific minerals. Mining jobs are primarily out of Darwin, and workers fly in-fly out on a fortnightly basis. There has been a significant reduction in such jobs recently, leading to some family and housing stress in Darwin.

Accommodation and housing present major concerns. There has been a remarkable development in Darwin of expensive high rise apartment buildings, and very large homes, all high cost. There has been minimal expansion of public housing. Social agencies report a severe shortage of affordable housing.

A significant number of transfers to the Territory are Defence Force families- there are extensive developments of Defence Housing, clustered in groups. Defence families, while supported through the ADF, have little if any connection into the surrounding community, and are without extended family support.

The issue of access to transport is a major concern. Not only is there virtually no public transport in towns outside Darwin (Darwin has a municipal bus service). Air travel between the cities of Darwin-Tennant Creek and Katherine has been discontinued, and travellers must either drive, or take long distance buses. A young woman could be discharged from Darwin hospital with an infant having received treatment, and be put on a bus to Tennant Creek where she will arrive near midnight. There are no night time taxis in Tennant Creek.

⁴ http://www.hreoc.gov.au/pdf/legal/seminars/snapshot_of_the_NT.pdf

Dialysis patients must transfer to either Alice Springs or Darwin- accompanied by their families all requiring accommodation and access to school. There is little help with such costs.

Access to education services and levels of educational achievement vary considerably between main towns and remoter communities. Charles Darwin University formed in 1973 through a merger of several earlier institutions, is a dual sector university, enabling study higher education (bachelor degrees to doctorates) and vocational education and training (VET) courses, from certificate I to advanced diploma level.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION-POINTS

The following points were made:

1. There is a lack of NT legislation to assist women with school-age children to negotiate flexible, family friendly working hours
2. NT salaries in community services don't match high NT living costs; short-term funding means people change sectors, 'leave sector', seek permanent employment out of sector.
3. NTWWS reported that they receive a very high number of complaints related to work-place bullying- discussion suggested this is related to low levels of access to in-job training, high levels of staff-turnover, lack of corporate memory. All related to lack of management support.
4. Lack of family and health services in regional and remote NT
5. Problem of training for indigenous workers without provision of employment pathways.
 - Existing training models are inflexible.
 - Government supported job placement agencies are ineffective.
 - Access to urban employment for indigenous workers is almost impossible due to lack of affordable accommodation, and gaps in training opportunities.
 - The centralisation of key health services forces indigenous families to leave their communities.
6. Contrasting work-place benefits- e.g., in remote schools non-local (white) staff have government provided housing, while locally recruited staff are not eligible for Government assistance with housing. In consequence, many

local school staff are living in houses with overcrowding (up to twenty people)

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Need for Commonwealth to revise training programs- offer flexibility and personal as well as professional development
2. Need to link training to actual employment
3. Need for flexible learning
4. Remedies needed for poor transport to and between regional and remote communities
5. Time for a whole of government approach which recognises the unique situations in the Territory
6. There is an overwhelming need for more child care, including out of school hours and vacation care to assist women to engage in training and to participate in the workforce.

ATTENDING CONSULTATION

Dr Tessa Lea	School for Social Policy and Research CDU
Joy Adams	Jackson School of health Sciences CDU
Chris Spargo	School for Social and Policy research CDU
Rollo Manning	RWM Consultancy
Naomi Porrovecchio	Office of Women's policy- Pay Equity
Christa Hilton	Executive Director YWCA of Darwin
Graham King	NT CoSS
Wendy Morton	Exec. Director NT CoSS
Cathy McMahon	School of Education CDU
Sue Emmett	School for Social Policy and Research CDU
Jenny Wolgemuth	School for Social Policy and Research CDU
Shane Thamm	School for Social Policy and Research CDU
Michael Duffy	NT State Schools Organisation
Anna Davis	NT Working Women's Service

ATTACHMENT – INVITE

Charles Darwin University
School for Social and Policy Research
Research for positive social change

Public seminar series 2009

Marie Coleman consultation

Marie Coleman Chairs the Social Policy Committee of the National Foundation for Australian Women (www.nfaw.org). NFAW has played a leadership role for national women's organisations in research and analysis of the impacts of the former WorkChoices and Welfare to Work policies on woman, and spearheaded the campaign which resulted in the establishment of the Productivity Commission Inquiry into a National Paid Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave Scheme.

Abstract

In this consultation, Marie wants to explore the local implications of the The Australia Institute's findings of the impact of the recession on women (click [here](#) to download the report).

Questions include: Is there any way some concerns can be addressed by local policy or program change, and which concerns require Commonwealth policy change?

Discussions could include local access to TAFE/VET, specifically for women who may be marginalised or among the 'hidden' unemployed; access to child care and Overseas Student Health Care; caring services (which could be an inhibiting factor for women wanting to study/join the workforce); and any other local knowledge about women's work-force participation which could inform national policy.

In this consultation, Marie wants to engage rural women, Indigenous, refugee and migrant women, as well as groups representing women more generally.

Time: 10:30am - 12pm

Date: Monday 26 October

Where: Charles Darwin University, Casuarina campus,
building blue 3, room 12/13

RSVP: Shane Thamm

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Where is building blue 3? Click [here](#) to view CDU map

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WomenSpeak

