

Election 2010: Towards justice, rights and reconciliation?

An analysis of the major parties' Indigenous affairs election platforms

Election campaign analysis

Indigenous issues scarcely rated a mention until the second last week of the election campaign when the Labor Party and the Coalition both released their election statements, which received limited media coverage. Due to the lateness of their release, Aboriginal people in many remote areas had started voting well before the major parties' policies on Indigenous issues were known.

The highlight of the campaign was the affirmation by all major parties of their support for constitutional recognition of Indigenous peoples with firm steps towards its achievement proposed. ANTaR warmly welcomed these commitments.

The Labor Party has committed to a threefold Indigenous affairs agenda: addressing under-investment in services, rewarding personal responsibility and resetting Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships. If re-elected, a Gillard Government will focus on implementing key reforms, with limited additional spending. The existing focus on 'personal responsibility', 'building social norms', increasing mainstream economic participation through employment, government contracts and maximising benefits from land holdings will be maintained. The Labor Party's commitment to move the NTER from emergency response to a sustainable development phase is positive though Labor has not outlined a long-term plan for sustainable development in the Northern Territory.

There are encouraging signs that the Coalition would seek to negotiate a new relationship with Indigenous peoples, with a pledge to 'build trust, empower and respect Indigenous leaders'. However, there is little further detail on how it plans to achieve this. Other positive aspects of the Coalition's agenda include the establishment of a Director-General of Indigenous Policy Implementation, additional dental health funding and support for Indigenous employment initiatives, including the Aboriginal Employment Strategy. However, on the whole, the platform contains limited policy detail and there are

some significant omissions – for example, how it will implement its commitment to Close the Gap in Indigenous life expectancy and health status.

In public statements made during the election campaign, the Coalition has also indicated that it would make Indigenous Affairs a stand alone ministerial portfolio in Cabinet and expand the role of the National Congress of Australian First Peoples representative body.

The Greens made two key election campaign announcements, pledging to support a Justice Reinvestment initiative to reduce Indigenous incarceration and constitutional recognition of Indigenous peoples. The Greens are the only party to have consistently opposed coercive aspects of the NTER, including compulsory leases and income management, and the party is committed to full reinstatement of the Racial Discrimination Act. The party's election platform sets out a range of positions in support of Indigenous rights, justice and reconciliation, as outlined below.

Early in the campaign ANTaR set out what it is seeking from parties in this election in our [election priorities statement](#). The following sets out the major parties' approaches to these key issues:

1. Reconciliation: time to deal with unfinished business

ANTaR is calling on all parties to commit to:

- Adopt the Council of Aboriginal Reconciliation Roadmap and Declaration as a framework for negotiation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to address the 'unfinished business' of reconciliation; and
- In consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, enact legislation for a constitutional referendum which seeks to:
 - Prepare a new preamble to the Constitution which recognises the status of the first Australians; and
 - Remove section 25 of the Constitution and introduce a new section making it unlawful to adversely discriminate against any people on the grounds of race.¹

The major parties' positions:

The Australian Labor Party:

The Labor Government's National Apology to the Stolen Generations must be acknowledged as a moment of great national significance in the history of reconciliation in Australia. The Apology saw, among other things, a re-commitment to the Labor Party platform of constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This election, the Labor Party has re-affirmed its commitment to constitutional recognition - outlining in broad terms a process to take this forward. A re-elected Gillard Government would establish a bipartisan Expert Panel, including Indigenous leaders, to consult 'extensively' with Indigenous people on options for constitutional reform. The

¹ See the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, *Reconciliation: Australia's Challenge*, December 2000.

terms of reference and membership of the panel would be jointly determined by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. Minister Macklin has indicated that the panel will initially focus on reform of the preamble 'in light of the need for majority support at a referendum'. The Labor Party Roadmap also commits to continuing support for Indigenous organisations established during its first term, such as the Healing Foundation, the National Congress, and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance as well as local community organisations.

The Coalition:

The Coalition's election platform makes a commitment to 'helping Indigenous Australians in a way which is respectful and recognises diversity in culture and governance'. It recognises that this will require the Coalition to 'build trust, empower and respect indigenous leaders'.

The Coalition has re-affirmed the commitment to constitutional recognition made by former Prime Minister Howard in the last election, stating that a Coalition Government would seek bipartisan support for a referendum in 2013. It is not clear whether the Coalition is open to considering substantive constitutional reform (e.g. of the race power) in addition to reform of the preamble. The Coalition does not support Labor's proposed bipartisan expert panel. Senator Scullion has indicated that the wording of the new proposed preamble would be developed by the middle of the next political term in time for the electorate to consider before the following election.

The Coalition's election platform also commits to establishing a Director-General of Indigenous Policy Implementation in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet who would report directly to the Prime Minister. This is a welcome proposal, which should help to achieve better policy coordination across portfolios.

The Greens:

The Greens have indicated that they will move to amend the Australian constitution to formally recognise Indigenous Australians. The Greens party platform states its belief that the Australian Constitution must recognise the prior occupation and sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Greens support the creation of a treaty that recognises the prior occupation and sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to be enshrined in the constitution.

Analysis

The cross-party commitment to Constitutional reform is significant and will be essential to build broad community support. The Labor Party's stated commitment to consultation and negotiation with Aboriginal people is important. The Coalition has not provided any detail about the process it will adopt in developing the form of words to put to referendum.

The Labor Party has kept the scope of potential reform broad (not ruling out substantive reform of the race power, for example, while recognising that preambular reform may be a starting point). The Coalition has at this stage only referred to reform of the preamble but has not ruled out other changes. It is essential that all major parties remain open to a range of reform options. Substantive changes must not be ruled out prior to negotiations

with Indigenous people, consultation with constitutional experts and the broader community. This should be a robust process, the outcome of which should not be predetermined by Government.

2. Creating safe and sustainable Northern Territory communities

This election, ANTaR is calling on all parties to commit to:

- A real shift from a coercive to a sustained community development approach as recommended by the *Little Children are Sacred* report;
- The full reinstatement of the *Racial Discrimination Act* to all NTER measures;
- Moving away from a compulsory, blanket income management model towards models which are voluntary or community-supported, and complemented by intensive case management and support services;
- Amending the NTER legislation to end compulsory five-year leases and instead seeking to obtain free, prior and informed consent of traditional owners for voluntary lease arrangements²; and
- Removing other coercive elements of the NTER.

The major parties' positions:

The Australian Labor Party:

The Labor Party has largely continued the previous Government's Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), but with some notable improvements, including the partial reinstatement of the *Racial Discrimination Act* and a shift from blanket to community developed alcohol management plans. Positive aspects of the NTER and related initiatives include additional safe houses, police, health services and additional family, child and community workers and services. However, many coercive aspects of the NTER have remained in place under the Labor Government including compulsory 5 year leases over Aboriginal land and extensive Business Management area powers, which include the ability to vary and terminate funding agreements and to make directions relating to provision of services and assets.

Labor's 'Roadmap for the Next Term', released on 8 August, re-affirms the party's strong support for compulsory income management despite the high cost and weak evidence base. Income management is currently being rolled out across the whole of the Northern Territory for certain categories of welfare recipients, likely to affect about 20,000 Indigenous people, the majority of whom will be Indigenous. The Labor Party is committed to evaluating the policy towards the end of 2011 and then rolling out the scheme to other declared disadvantaged areas across the country. Positively, the Roadmap states that the Government will 'continue to move the emergency response to a sustainable development phase' and that it will 'empower Indigenous people to drive solutions for lasting change'. However, there is no further detail at this stage as to how this will be achieved. The strategy does not outline a long-term community development strategy for remote Northern Territory communities.

² See recommendation 4 of the Social Justice Commissioner's *Native Title Report 2009*.

The Coalition:

The NTER was developed and originally implemented by the previous Coalition Government and it has continued to support this approach while in Opposition. While the Coalition has expressed concerns about what they have described as Labor's 'softening' of the original emergency response, it has ultimately supported most of the Labor Government's legislative amendments, including the legislation partially reinstating the *Racial Discrimination Act* and extending the compulsory income management scheme. The Coalition is a strong supporter of compulsory income management, with Tony Abbott recently indicating that he would support a further extension of the scheme, to cover a broader range of income support recipients (beyond the long-term categories under the Labor scheme).

The Greens:

During the first term of the Labor Government, the Greens have been the one Parliamentary voice of opposition to key aspects of the NTER, particularly compulsory income management and compulsory leases. The Greens have called for the full and immediate reinstatement of the *Racial Discrimination Act* to all NTER measures. The party platform states that the Greens will revoke the quarantining of income support payments for Aboriginal people in prescribed communities and lift policy requirements that make the provision of new housing contingent on long-term leasing and on handing management of housing from community organisations to State and Territory housing agencies.

The Greens are committed to:

- supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community initiatives and networks to address family violence and abuse, resource Aboriginal Women's Legal Services, establish safe houses in communities, and support initiatives to reduce substance abuse;
- ensuring that there is effective policing in remote communities negotiated with community elders, including infrastructure to ensure a live-in police presence, and ongoing funding for successful community night-patrol programs.

Analysis

The Labor Party and the Coalition have, to date, maintained broadly similar policies on the NTER. Disappointingly, neither has outlined a clear long-term sustainable community development plan. This is despite the fact that the original intervention measures are due to expire during the next term of government and there is a pressing need to develop an ongoing strategy to address the suite of complex issues identified in the *Little Children are Sacred* report and broader issues of poverty and disadvantage in remote communities. The Greens are the only party to support the full reinstatement of the *Racial Discrimination Act* to all NTER measures, and to oppose compulsory income management.

3. Protecting rights to land, culture and language

This election, ANTaR is calling on all parties to commit to:

- Providing additional resources to Native Title Representative Bodies (NTRB) to ensure they are adequately resourced to represent Indigenous peoples in native title negotiations;
- Providing additional resources to Prescribed Bodies Corporate (PBC) to ensure that they are able to fulfill their responsibilities to manage their lands;
- Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to develop a social justice package which complements the native title system;³
- Developing a national Indigenous languages body to assess critically endangered Indigenous languages and resource an ongoing plan of action for the preservation and promotion of Indigenous languages;⁴ and
- Providing needs-based funding and support for all homeland communities.

The major parties' positions:

The Australian Labor Party:

The Labor Party Roadmap commits to respecting the right of Indigenous people to live on traditional country. Its election 'Closing the Gap' statement commits the Labor Party to maintaining efforts to streamline complex native title processes. The Labor Government also released a number of native title reform discussion papers prior to the election. It is assumed that these consultation processes will resume if the Gillard Government is re-elected. The paper on maximising benefits from native title agreements is discussed below under 'economic development'. The Government also released a discussion paper on native title, economic development and tax which proposed several options for tax reform including a native title income tax exemption, a new tax exempt vehicle and a withholding tax. The Rudd/Gillard Government has developed a National Indigenous Languages Action Plan supported by funding of \$9.3 million for language maintenance and revival projects.

The Coalition:

With the exception of its opposition to the wild rivers legislation in Queensland (discussed below), the Coalition's election platform does not outline a policy position on the future of native title or the protection of Indigenous culture and languages.

The Greens:

The Greens policy platform states a commitment to amend the *Native Title Act 1993* to ensure consistency with international law and human rights undertakings and to amend

³ See detailed recommendations by former Social Justice Commissioners Mick Dodson in *Social Justice Report 2005* and Tom Calma in *Native Title Report 2008*.

⁴ This was a recommendation of the Social Justice Commissioner in the 2009 *Social Justice Report*.

the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984*, and other applicable legislation to:

- respect customary law restrictions;
- guarantee access to significant sites by people with cultural connections to the site;
- establish independent cultural heritage bodies;
- ensure minimum protection standards under Commonwealth, state and territory laws;
- protect all aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage including intellectual property; and
- ensure that heritage decisions are made by the relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

ANTaR welcomes this very positive commitment.

The party platform also commits to ensuring the protection of rights to hunt, fish and gather native flora and fauna in line with traditional cultural practice.

Analysis

None of the major parties have made a commitment to better resourcing of Native Title Representative Bodies or Prescribed Bodies Corporate. The Labor Party's native title reform agenda has met with opposition from some Indigenous leaders and native title experts. The Coalition has not outlined a clear vision for the future of native title law and processes. The Greens have explicitly adopted a human rights framework in their positions on native title, by reference to the UN Declaration.

4. Implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

This election, ANTaR is calling on all parties to commit to:

- The full implementation of the UN Declaration into domestic law and policy;
- Including the UN Declaration in the human rights legislative scrutiny process;
- Developing, as a priority, and in consultation with Indigenous peoples, clear protocols and guidelines for the implementation of the right to free, prior and informed consent;
- Giving real effect to the right of Indigenous peoples to develop and administer health, housing and other economic and social programs affecting them (Article 23); and
- Giving serious consideration to the enactment of a national human rights act, which includes the rights contained in the UN Declaration, when the National Human Rights Framework is reviewed.

The major parties' positions

The Australian Labor Party:

Reversing the previous Coalition Government's position, the Labor Government pledged support for the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in April 2009. It has not yet begun a process of implementation of the Declaration in domestic law. The Labor Government announced its National Human Rights Framework earlier this year, which included plans to enhance parliamentary scrutiny of legislation for human rights compatibility and allocated resources for human rights education. However, the enactment of a national human rights act has been shelved until a review of the human rights framework in 2014.

The Coalition:

The Howard Government refused to sign the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It is unclear whether the Coalition's position on the Declaration has changed since it was signed by the Labor Government in April. The Coalition has also indicated that it would abandon the Labor Government's national Human Rights Framework.

The Greens:

The Greens have called for the full implementation of the UN Declaration in domestic law. They have also supported the enactment of a national human rights act.

Analysis

The Labor Party's support for the UN Declaration was a very positive step, but it has not yet committed to a process of implementation in domestic law. The Coalition has not supported the UN Declaration in the past, and its current position is not known. The Coalition does not support the National Human Rights Framework and therefore seems unlikely to prioritise domestic implementation of the UN Declaration, particularly in light of its previous opposition. The Greens support a broad Indigenous human rights agenda, including full implementation of the Declaration and the national Human Rights Framework.

5. Justice reinvestment: a new approach to crime prevention that makes economic and social sense

This election, ANTaR is calling on all parties to commit to implement the recommendations of the *Social Justice Report 2009*:

- To set criminal justice targets through COAG that are integrated into the Closing the Gap agenda; and
- To fund pilot Justice Reinvestment projects in targeted communities, with a view to rolling-out the scheme more broadly informed by evidence from these pilots.

The major parties' positions

The Australian Labor Party:

The Labor Party has not made any public statements on Justice Reinvestment. The Rudd/Gillard Government led development of a National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework with the states and territories aimed at reducing the over-representation of Indigenous peoples. It has also increased funding to Aboriginal legal services.

The Coalition:

The Coalition has not made any public statements on Justice Reinvestment, or Indigenous law and justice policy during this election.

The Greens:

The Greens are the only party to have made a public commitment to Justice Reinvestment strategies, calling for the Commonwealth Government, through the Standing Committees of Attorneys General, to initiate the national rollout of Justice Reinvestment strategies in conjunction with state and territory governments.

Analysis

It must be acknowledged that criminal justice law and policy is predominantly a state and territory government responsibility. However, the Federal Government, working through COAG, can play an important role in driving national policy change in this area. For this reason, the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma, called for COAG to set criminal justice targets which are integrated into the Closing the Gap agenda. To date, neither the Labor Party nor the Coalition has publicly adopted this recommendation, however the Rudd/Gillard Government's National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework aims to reduce Indigenous over-representation in the criminal justice system. The Greens made an election statement in support of Justice Reinvestment strategies and is the only party to have made a public commitment to this approach.

6. Supporting Indigenous economic development

This election, ANTaR is calling on all parties to commit to:

- Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other stakeholders to develop options which would enable native title holders to exercise native title rights for a commercial purpose;
- Increasing the number of fully-funded municipal services positions for Indigenous Australians to replace former Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) positions; and
- Maintaining a flexible, incentive-based, community-directed employment program as an alternative to income support payments in regional and remote communities.

The major parties' positions

The Australian Labor Party:

The Labor Party has indicated that a key focus of a second term will be implementing its Indigenous employment strategy with a clear focus on mainstream economic participation. A draft strategy was released for consultation earlier this year. A related priority is on 'maximising benefits' of native title agreements for communities with an emphasis on sustainability and inter-generational benefits. The consultation paper released earlier this year includes a range of proposals to increase regulation and oversight of native title agreements. These have been criticised by the NSW Native Title Service Corporation and a range of Indigenous leaders on the basis that they will add another layer of unnecessary government bureaucracy and that claims about the mismanagement of native title proceeds are overstated.

The Labor Party has pledged 'to continue efforts to ensure Indigenous people play a central role in land related industries'. The commitment to increase Indigenous home ownership was re-affirmed (a discussion paper on reform options was released earlier this year and will presumably provide the basis for further policy development in this area). The Labor Party has committed to fund Indigenous training centres to support the Australian Employment Covenant goal of creating 50,000 jobs for Indigenous people.

The Labor Government abolished CDEP in non-remote areas and is progressively transferring those receiving CDEP wages on to income support payments (by July 2011). This has resulted in a loss of income, opportunity and incentive to work for many Aboriginal people. Although the replacement in the Northern Territory of 1500 CDEP positions with fully funded government service delivery positions is welcome, a clear gap remains between the number of CDEP jobs that will be abolished in the NT by July 2011 (estimated to be over 8000) and the limited number of fully-funded Government jobs currently available (about 1500). The Labor Party has not outlined any plan to develop a new flexible, incentive-based community development employment program to bridge this gap.

The Coalition:

The Coalition will provide additional funding to the Aboriginal Employment Strategy (\$8 million) and the Australian Employment Covenant (\$8 million). The Coalition has also made a bipartisan commitment to support the creation of Indigenous training centres to support Generation One to achieve its employment target. However, it announced that it would expand eligibility for jobs under the Australian Employment Covenant to non-Indigenous long-term unemployed Australians. It is not clear whether the original target of 50,000 jobs for Indigenous Australians will be maintained, with additional jobs created for non-Indigenous Australians, or whether both groups will be eligible for the 50,000 jobs originally committed (meaning fewer jobs for Indigenous people). As part of its economic development agenda, the Coalition has announced that it will abolish the permit system to access Aboriginal communities, community land or facilities, but retain it to access other Aboriginal lands. The Coalition will maintain its opposition to the wild rivers legislation in Queensland. Its election statement is silent on the future of CDEP and flexible employment policy alternatives.

The Greens:

The Greens policy platform states that it will conduct a comprehensive study of opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and enterprise development in remote, rural and urban communities, and implement the recommendations. In supporting the Queensland Wild Rivers legislation, the Greens have argued that nation-wide reforms to the *Native Title Act* are a more appropriate way to require the consent or agreement of Aboriginal people with regard to wild rivers declarations than the reforms to the Queensland legislation proposed by the Coalition.

Analysis

The Indigenous election platforms of the Labor Party and the Coalition have a strong focus on economic development. However, neither of the parties has outlined a vision for a new flexible Indigenous community-directed employment program nor committed to expanding the number of fully-funded service positions to replace CDEP jobs. While both the Labor Party and the Coalition have indicated support for the Australian Employment Covenant, it is not clear whether the Coalition plans to maintain its commitment to the Indigenous employment target of 50,000, as it would expand eligibility to non-Indigenous long-term unemployed people.

7. Sorry is the first step: reparations for the Stolen Generations

This election, ANTaR is calling on all parties to commit to:

- Progressing the priority issues set down in the Stolen Generations' Working Partnership announced on 26 May 2010; and
- The full implementation of the *Bringing them Home* report's recommendations through a comprehensive government response developed in partnership with Stolen Generations groups, as well as Link-Ups and other service providers including restitution, rehabilitation and compensation.

The major parties' positions

The Australian Labor Party:

ANTaR welcomed the creation of the Healing Foundation by the Rudd/Gillard Government. The Labor Party Closing the Gap statement says that it will act in accordance with the priorities outlined in the Government's Stolen Generations Working Partnership, which include access to services, healing, justice system and education.

The Coalition:

The Coalition's election platform does not outline a Stolen Generations future policy agenda.

The Greens:

The Greens party platform states that ‘Australian governments must recognise the continuing effect of past treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and provide restitution to the stolen generations.’ The Greens introduced the Stolen Generations Reparations Bill after the National Apology seeking fair compensation for those affected by Stolen Generations policies

Analysis

While the Labor Party has committed to progressing the issues in the Stolen Generations Working Partnership, neither it nor the Coalition has made a commitment to implement the broader recommendations of the Bringing the Home report, including those related to compensation. The Greens are the only major party to have consistently supported payment of compensation for the Stolen Generations.

8. Compensation for Stolen Wages

This election, ANTaR is calling on all parties to commit to:

- Implementing the recommendations of the 2006 Senate Committee report on Stolen Wages, including working with state and territory governments to establish adequate state compensation schemes.

The major parties’ positions

The Australian Labor Party:

The Labor Party’s election platform is silent on the issue of stolen wages

The Coalition:

The Coalition’s election platform is silent on the issue of stolen wages.

The Greens:

The Greens are committed to paying fair compensation for wages withheld by previous governments. During the election, Senator Siewert pledged that the party would continue to pursue this issue, acknowledging that time was running out for many of those affected.

Analysis

Acknowledging that the issue of Stolen Wages varies between state and territories and requires state responses, the Federal Government can play an important role in driving national reforms in this area to achieve justice for those affected. In this election, major parties have failed to address compensation for stolen wages in their election platforms and announcements, with only the Greens committing to progress the issue.

9. A comprehensive national plan to Close the Gap

This election, ANTaR is calling on all parties to agree to:

- Delivering on their commitment to develop ‘a comprehensive, long-term plan of action, that is targeted to need, evidence-based and capable of addressing the existing inequities in health services, in order to achieve equality of health status and life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians by 2030’;
- In particular, the plan must:
 - Build the capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services;
 - Ensure equitable access to all relevant mainstream programs and services;
 - Address the social and cultural determinants of health; and
 - Address the health needs of marginalised sub-groups within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population; and
- Reporting on progress against the Close the Gap targets annually on the first sitting day of Parliament.

The major parties’ positions

The Australian Labor Party:

The Rudd/Gillard Government allocated an additional \$1.57 billion for Indigenous health over four years, which was a significant investment, welcomed by the Close the Gap coalition. Investment has focused on chronic disease.

This election, the Labor Party has committed to implementing a new National Framework on Alcohol and Substance Abuse through COAG, to deal with alcohol and substance abuse. It has promised \$20 million for the Framework and associated initiatives. This is the only additional funding committed to Indigenous health initiatives in this election. The Labor Party has committed to support the development of community-led Alcohol Management Plans and to fund local communities and NGOs to deliver targeted programs aimed at preventing substance abuse by young people, but it is not clear whether this will be drawn from previously allocated funds.

The Coalition:

The Coalition committed to the Close the Gap platform in 2008. Coalition Indigenous Spokesperson, Senator Nigel Scullion, recently affirmed the Coalition’s commitment to the Close the Gap agenda. The election statement commits \$22 million to establish an Indigenous Dental Programme, which would provide a dental hygienist to remote Aboriginal Medical Services ‘upon request, for an agreed period’. The Coalition has also committed to examine the results of the NTER dental health checks and to work out what follow-up dental health care is needed.

The Greens:

The Greens have been a longstanding supporter of the Close the Gap campaign, pledging their support in 2007.

The Greens policy platform makes a commitment to:

- increase resources in both community-controlled health services and mainstream services, through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Framework Agreements and Aboriginal Regional Health Plans;
- make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's health a funding priority, with a focus on community-controlled health services and additional community-based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander childcare services.

Analysis

With cross-party support for the Close the Gap agenda fundamental to achieving ambitious health equality targets, ANTaR welcomes the major parties' ongoing commitment to this agenda. The development of a comprehensive, long-term health plan must be an early priority for whichever party wins government. We will also be looking for sustained investment in Indigenous health services and infrastructure over the coming years.

10. Building blocks for health and economic participation: Housing and education

This election, ANTaR is calling on all parties to commit to:

- Substantial additional investment in remote Indigenous education to fund teacher and staff salaries and infrastructure; and
- Removing Australian Government restrictions on new Indigenous community-controlled housing and building the capacity of the Indigenous community housing sector nationally.⁵

The major parties' positions

The Australian Labor Party:

The Rudd/Gillard Government allocated an additional \$5.5 billion for remote housing over 10 years, but implementation has been inefficient. The Labor Party is committed to continuing reforms to remote housing funding to penalise states and territories that do not meet targets and rewards those that do. The Labor Government has pursued an Indigenous housing reform agenda which has required communities to sign long-term leases over land in exchange for housing services, and has transferred the control and management of remote housing from community organisations to state and territory housing authorities.

The Labor Government's new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan outlines key Labor priorities including school readiness, attendance and literacy and numeracy. The Rudd/Gillard Government has provided additional funding for remote

⁵ See, for example, conditions contained in the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing.

education, funding additional teachers in Northern Territory communities, as well as for early childhood education.

The Coalition:

The Coalition's election statement does not outline a broad Indigenous education policy, but includes two specific Indigenous education initiatives. The Coalition will support the Cape York Family Responsibilities Commission to improve school attendance by providing an additional \$16 million over four years to the program. It has pledged to fast-track Northern Territory boarding school facilities promised, but not yet delivered by Labor. The Coalition platform does not outline an Indigenous housing policy in any detail, but it has previously stated that it would deliver the houses promised by Labor.

The Greens:

The Greens' party platform makes a commitment to fund a 10 year Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing plan, with a focus on appropriate housing and infrastructure, and with a component providing training and resources for ongoing maintenance, to address unmet need.

Analysis

There have been few new announcements from the major parties on Indigenous education or housing in this election. It is anticipated that a re-elected Labor Government would continue to implement its expanded housing program and reform agenda. The Coalition has not released a detailed Indigenous housing policy and neither Labor or the Coalition has committed to build the capacity of the Aboriginal housing sector nationally.