

Slide 1: Title

What Community Broadcasters Should Know

About The Northern Territory Intervention

And What They Can Do About It

CBAA National conference

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Jim Remedio

Good morning everyone.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners the **Wurrunggerri** people Wominjeka (or welcome)

On a recent visit to the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA), in Alice Springs, SBS Dateline presenter George Negus was asked by a cadet journalist what his thoughts were, following the Federal Government intervention into Northern Territory Aboriginal communities.

His response was, and I quote, **“it is undoubtedly in breach of probably every United Nations Human Rights and Indigenous Rights Declaration or Covenant ever bought down”**

He made the comment. **“where does that leave Australia in the eyes of the world”?**

Today, I would like to share with you my observations, from a community broadcasters perspective, on the real fall out in Central Australia, since the July 2007 state of emergency.

When the Federal Government declared a ‘state of emergency’ and brought out the Norforce Regiment, images come to mind of the total disintegration of a society.

A state of emergency is usually proclaimed as a result of natural disasters, or in extreme cases, civil unrest.

Think of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, and the Darwin and North Queensland cyclones. When a Federal Government brings in the army, it sends the message that you have a **failed state**, and that all governance and civil order is in chaos.

Was this really the state of things in the Northern Territory?

Howard has said he needed to declare a state of emergency in the Northern Territory following the “Little Children Are Sacred” report.

The report actually said that Aboriginal child sexual abuse in the Northern Territory should be designated as an issue of urgent national significance, and provided 97 recommendations as a way to do this. Aboriginal people, almost as one, are in support of these recommendations.

Yet the measures taken bear no relation to the recommendations in that report.

The very first, and most important recommendation, was that “the government commit to genuine consultation with Aboriginal people in designing initiatives’

As you know, there was no consultation, not even any notice.

Here’s what the Intervention put in place

(Slide 2 – Intervention measures)

There is no correlation between the justification used by Howard and Brough for the intervention and the Anderson Wilde report. None of these things were recommended.

What they did take direction from, was an ideology one promoted through conservative think tanks including the **Centre for Independent Studies**, the **Institute of Public Affairs**, who receive significant support from large corporations, particularly mining companies. In the case of Cape York Institute \$40 Million of federal funded taxpayer money. These think tanks have close links with the Howard Government and are significantly supported and promoted through mainstream media, especially The Australian newspaper.

The thing with think tanks is that they can produce research that does not come under the same scrutiny as academic research and therefore does not reach the same level of credibility as proper academic research.

To date, since the intervention, there have been only 2 referrals, no arrests, and no convictions from Central Australia since the army and doctors came to do health checks.

The legislation for the intervention has included only 2 of the recommendations from the report and has been used to bludgeon Aboriginal communities into the new assimilation **pogrom** (and I do mean pogrom).

Of particular concern to me - and should be of concern to all of us here today - is the governments’ suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act - this was necessary to make these measures possible.

Some of you may rightly ask, what has the intervention got to do with community broadcasting? Isn't the intervention a good thing?

And what's the connection with community broadcasting anyway?

We live in a country of many nations and many languages. Community radio broadcasters, whatever our makeup, have running through us a common thread that binds us all together as broadcasters.

That common thread is expressed through the Community Broadcasting Codes of Practice.

(Slide 3 – COP guiding principles and Code 1)

The guiding principles of the code include to

- Promote harmony and cultural diversity
- Pursue the principles of democracy, access and equity, particularly to people and issues under-represented in other media
- Demonstrate independence in programming, editorial and management

Code 1 aims to ensure these “guiding principles” are reflected in the day to day activities of stations.

In Code 1.4, we commit to policies and practices which:

“**oppose and attempt to break down prejudice** on the basis of ethnicity, race, chosen language, gender, sexual preference, religion, age, physical or mental ability, occupation, cultural belief or political affiliation.

By contrast, in the commercial radio codes of practise, the licensee must not broadcast a program which is “**likely**” to incite or perpetuate hatred against or vilify any person or group on the basis of age, ethnicity, race etc.

But beyond this, we all acknowledge that commercial shock jocks are the “**most likely**” person or group to incite, perpetuate, or vilify any group or persons on the basis of race or ethnicity.

But in community broadcasting the difference is;

Our role is active.

Our responsibilities as community broadcasters is to adhere to the Codes of Practice, and oppose discrimination. Especially when we see that the freedoms and rights of one section of our community are being stripped away.

The mainstream media came out and supported the Government intervention, with The Australian newspaper the shock jocks of print media in Australia leading the charge, on issues such as the scrapping of the permit system, quarantining of welfare payments, scrapping of the CDEP.

On the other hand, the Community radio current affairs program **The Wire** take the time to provide our sector with a balanced view of current affairs, and I congratulate The Wire team for their commitment to the community and their adherence to the Codes of Practice.

Following a continuing mass migration of Aboriginal people from the Northern Territory to Coober Pedy in South Australia, Minister for Aboriginal affairs Mal Brough said “it did not matter if people moved to the **“gold coast”**”.

The rules of quarantining 50% of welfare payments would “follow them” There is no escape.

The mayor of Coober Pedy pleaded for Government assistance to help his remote town cope with the influx. He said “there has been a marked increase in the number of Indigenous people in the town” and that it was “unacceptable for aboriginal people to sleep on the street”.

He went on to say “it’s a concern, we now have over 300 displaced people here. That’s a 10% increase in our population, we have nowhere to house these people.”

He said that for many years they had been lobbying the government for short- term accommodation and, “our view is that the federal government is responsible for the situation because of the intervention.

In my view these displaced people meet the criteria under the United Nations Human Rights Commission as internally **displaced people**.

The definition of internally displaced persons according to the UNHRC is :

“People forced to flee their homes but who, unlike refugees remain within their countries borders”.

The situation is the same throughout the Territory as people desert communities as services and access decline.

The Governments policy of “starving out” communities is beginning to take effect.

In Alice Springs, Aboriginal people are now forced to line up at a Centerlink bus a long walk from the shops on Saturday mornings to receive their Centerlink quarantined payment.

Picture this; – because there is child abuse in your community – (and you know there is) - that all of you have to go to one end of town to line up at a bus to get access to your money before you can go shopping at a designated supermarket.

Consider too, that it will cost approximately \$8000 in administration costs per person to quarantine half their income.

No matter what your own personal view, a civil society as ours built on a fair go and a social conscience should not be treating its people in such a despicable way.

On the down side for business, motel accommodation is in short supply in Alice Springs as the intervention team take up accommodation that would otherwise be booked by tourists and others. This can only impact on the whole town economy as well as tourism in the Territory.

Stripping away the Community Development Employment Program or (CDEP) as it is know and wrongly referred to by mainstream media as sit down money, has pushed people to the edge of despair and poverty as they see no future for themselves or their children. Community radio stations, and remote BRACS units who relied heavily on CDEP to run their stations now face closure and reports are reaching the National Peak Body for Media AICA of their plight.

CDEP was a work program. It was removed so people could be put on welfare and their payments controlled, as the Government didn't have the power to quarantine people's actual wages. The spin used is "managed income"

Between 7,000 and 8,000 people in the Territory have now been thrown out of work and their welfare payments "income managed"

CAAMA alone, one of the largest community broadcasters in Australia has lost 5 CDEP positions. This loss will impact on CAAMA's capacity to deliver.

Imagine what it is like in the other more remote centres, when their radio staff and employment opportunities are scrapped.

These positions have been lost as a direct result of the intervention to protect Aboriginal children from sexual abuse. Are you confused? So are we.

(Slide 3 still up – Codes of Practice)

What is more – look at **Code 1.2 – “be controlled and operated by an autonomous body which is representative of the licensee's community of interest”**

There are 10 community radio licensees in the prescribed areas and the licence holders are the community councils of these communities.

Under the '**Business Management**' part of the Intervention – the Government can appoint Managers to run these community councils.

These Managers have enormous potential powers. They can seize assets, sell them, regardless of whether they were bought with Government funds or income earned by the community. They can unilaterally alter funding agreements. They can tell people what they can say and what they can't say, to perform specific services and to 'desist or refrain' from others.

In this environment, all sense of autonomous community control is gone.

How can a community licensee continue under these conditions? They will be in breach of their licence.

Again, I ask you to consider if this was your station. Have you spent years building your station to have this happen because Well why is it happening?

Aboriginal people are powerless against outfits such as The Cape York Institute a non-democratic, non-representative body that speaks on Indigenous issues without authority from a membership.

Yet it claims to represent and speak on behalf of Australia's Indigenous people.

As a result the Northern Territory's Indigenous people are being experimented on, with national application to follow. These are policies of discrimination and division in what appears to be

“a gulag for the Aboriginal people”.

As a result people are now leaving their communities and are being forced off their land again.

It's their land, it's their home.

Remote communities on these lands are now becoming deserted as stores shut down, CDEP programs are cut off, and in one case that has come to our attention, the threat of water being cut off because council did not have the sufficient funds to pay.

Under this threat people just left. And as they leave, the houses are being pilfered of solar panels, generator sets and water tanks.

Maybe the skeptics are right; it is just a land grab? Maybe we should ask, as George Negus did “what does the rest of the world think”?

The dilemma for me and many other Indigenous people in mixed partnerships, is, what do I tell my children, my Torres Strait Island child and my extended family white children. How does a father, explain such extreme racism to them?

What would their great grandfather think about the Australia he fought for on the Somme during the Great War. So I hope you can have a think about what you can do as community broadcasters.

I mean “What bloody hope have we got”.

Thank you for listening to me today

Jim Remedio

(Slide 4: Further information)

www.icnn.com.au

www.caama.com.au

www.the.wire.com.au

www.Womenforwik.com.au

www.nirs.org.au