



NT intervention stagnant, just another failed plan: Mal Brough

- Patricia Karvelas
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ARCHITECT of the controversial Northern Territory intervention Mal Brough has declared the radical policy he masterminded to end a crisis in Aboriginal Australia a comprehensive failure, amid escalating violence and dysfunction in Alice Springs.

The Howard government indigenous affairs minister said his policy, introduced in mid-2007, needed to be dramatically advanced in order for it to deliver lasting social change.

But he claimed the Gillard government had left it "stagnant", allowing dysfunction to grow.

"The intervention isn't working," Mr Brough told *The Weekend Australian*.

"Because it wasn't the Labor Party's policy, they just adopted it for political reasons. They failed to take it to the next level.

"It has become stagnant and buried in bureaucracy. It is no longer working.

"Without radical changes, it is yet another failed approach.

"You are now seeing the concentration of human suffering. Serious action has to be taken where the fringe-dwellers are killing themselves and their kids.

"You need a zero-tolerance approach now."

In the past week, *The Australian* has detailed the impact of sharply rising crime rates in Alice Spring, triggering crisis meetings in the city between government and community leaders.

This is despite the intervention imposing tough new restrictions on the sale of alcohol in Alice Spring and measures to transform the city's overcrowded and dysfunctional town camps, by investing in new houses, fixing other houses and forcing residents to pay their rent. Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin said this week tackling the situation in Alice Springs was at the top of her priority list.

She said the government's program to transform the city's derelict indigenous town camps as part of the intervention was in its infancy but she was already looking at wide measures to improving people's living conditions.

"We are putting in place the largest ever investment that's ever been attempted, not just in the Alice Springs town camps, where the situation of course was and continues to be a really huge priority for us, but also in Alice Springs itself," she said.

Mr Brough said he supported an extreme proposal for a large prison farm to be built outside Alice Springs, where drinkers could be rehabilitated through craft-learning, trade schools and manual work.

He said it should be compulsory for substance abusers to be sent to such a facility, and insisted it should not be set up as a prison but as a well-funded centre that changes lives.

"The drug and alcohol dependencies need to be dealt with, but not in a voluntary way," he said.

"If this continues you will see the destruction of Alice Springs and the destruction of a generation of kids."

He said the prison farm idea was not draconian and was not about incarcerating people.

"It has to have all the clinical-style elements. It needs thorough and complete rehabilitation -- it's about changing lives, not punishing people," he said.

This proposal was first put forward by Adam Giles, member for the Territory seat of Braitling, which takes in parts of Alice Springs.

Mr Brough, who lost his seat in parliament in the 2007 election, said if he had seen the intervention through he would have moved it to a new stage and talked honestly with communities about their ongoing viability.

"We needed to be honest with people where they live in places with no economic future," he said. "We need to stop lying to them and telling them that miraculously things would improve in their backyard."

He said his plan was a staged approach to get people to move where there was economic opportunity rather than perpetuating the "myth" that economies could be created where there were no real job opportunities.

Meanwhile, senior ALP figure and indigenous leader Warren Mundine called for traditional Aboriginal manhood ceremonies to be formally linked to the school system and curriculum.

This would ensure that if communities wanted their children to undergo the ceremonies they would need to ensure they completed school, he said.

Mr Mundine flagged the proposal at last week's indigenous leadership conference in Brisbane, where leaders agreed it needed to be explored.

Mr Mundine told The Weekend Australian cultural ceremonies should not happen in isolation from mainstream education.

"We need to engage formal education in what is happening in their traditional lives. We need to tie manhood ceremony procedures with economic outcomes, so you don't

go through the full manhood ceremony until you are 18 and you've finished school," he said.

Under current practice many of these ceremonies occur when children are younger than 18.

Mr Mundine said the breakdown in Alice Springs showed that the problems were deeply entrenched and the government must continue its program of welfare and work reform.

The problems in the town were illustrated last weekend when a prolonged brawl broke out during a match at an Alice Springs cricket ground. Despite the fighting, players and spectators went about their business without paying a second's attention.

The Northern Territory intervention -- introduced in June 2007 by the Howard government and worth \$1.2bn over three years -- set out to bring about immediate change by effectively declaring a state of emergency in some 73 indigenous communities.

It introduced alcohol controls, compulsory quarantining of welfare payments and land acquisitions to allow for proper tenancy management to occur.