

## Department confirms work for the dole penalties are permanent, contradicting **Indigenous** Affairs minister

By Kate Wild  
ABC News  
16 June 2016

The Indigenous Affairs Minister has backed away from his claim that financial penalties applied under the Federal Government's remote work for the dole program are temporary.

Nigel Scullion made the admission on Thursday after the Department of Employment said about 45,000 financial penalties applied to people who did not attend remote work for the dole activities last year were not back paid to welfare recipients.

The Department's statement directly contradicted the Minister's repeated claim last week that welfare payments for people in the Community Development Program (CDP) were "at worst suspended" for non-compliance.

"The payment is only suspended until they agree to attend an activity and the payments are resumed and the back payments are made," Senator Scullion told the ABC last week.

"So this notion that is floating around that somehow there is less money to spend ... at worst they've been delayed."

The Minister's original comment came in response to industry bodies linking a drop in food sales in remote supermarkets to financial penalties attached to work for the dole in remote Australia.

Analysis of data released by the Government in June showed a sharp increase in the number of financial penalties applied to people on work for the dole programs in remote Australia in the first six months of its operation.

People on work for the dole under CDP are required to do activities such as landscaping, community clean-up, walking children to school and housing repairs.

To qualify for full payment they need to work five days a week for 25 hours.

A "No Show No Pay" penalty is worth 10 per cent of a person's fortnightly payment for each day they fail to turn up for activities.

Organisations that provide work for the dole activities have told the ABC a one-day penalty normally equates to about \$50.

The Minister made the comments in response to analysis that around 51,000 financial penalties were applied to the 30,000 people engaged in remote work for the dole programs in the first six months of CDP's operation in 2015.

Senator Scullion conceded through a spokesman today that he "could have been clearer" when he commented on the penalties regime.

#### Welfare bodies remain critical of program

David Thompson, chief executive of Jobs Australia which represents organisations that provide work for the dole programs, said feedback from his members confirmed the Department's figures.

"The clear feedback we're getting from our members delivering the Community Development Program is a very large number of people are incurring financial penalties and that they do not regain the money," Mr Thompson said.

The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) said Work for the Dole in remote Australia had failed.

"These penalties are harsh," ACOSS chief executive Cassandra Goldie said.

"It means people are going without food, they're going without the very essentials and the minister needs to urgently investigate these deeply concerning statistics," she said.

Dr Goldie claimed a reduction in spending on work for the dole programs signalled in the federal budget was recognition by Government that the program was a failure.

"It was failed in other parts of the country. There was some recognition of that in the federal budget and yet the government seems determined to pursue it in remote communities," she said.

She said ACOSS advised the Government when CDP was first proposed, that it would be "unworkable in remote Australia".