
Aurukun: Queensland Government accused of contributing to crisis in Indigenous community

By Annie Guest
ABC News
26 May 2016

The Queensland Government has been accused of contributing to the crisis in the Indigenous community of Aurukun by overlooking a local tenderer for a major mining project.

Twenty teachers have been evacuated from the community again after attacks on the school principal, teachers' homes and security guards.

The latest violence comes about two weeks after the teachers were first evacuated from Aurukun because of the unrest.

Cape York Indigenous leader Noel Pearson said he warned the Government in March about escalating violence in the community.

Former investment banker and lawyer Duncan Murray is the chief executive of Noel Pearson's Cape York Partnership.

Mr Murray said the Queensland Government ignored an opportunity to create jobs for the Aurukun community when it overlooked a local company for a major mining tender.

"Part of the challenges we're seeing on the ground today in Aurukun are a function of the absence of jobs," Mr Murray said.

"And there was a compelling and elegant answer on the table for the last couple of years which hasn't been grasped."

The tender to develop a large bauxite deposit was awarded to the multi-national Glencore in 2014.

A company called Aurukun Bauxite Development, which involved Native Title holders and a former Comalco chief executive, was overlooked for the tender.

Calls for special tender rules

Mr Murray said Aurukun Bauxite Development promised to deliver local jobs.

"Large offshore mining companies paying royalties to traditional owners isn't the optimal way forward," he said.

The tender decision, backed by the previous LNP and current Labor governments, has been the subject of legal action and a lapsed Senate inquiry.

Mr Murray said the Government made a mistake when they awarded the tender.

"The Government and the taxpayers who they represent could have made a very good decision to proceed down that path and it would have been a win-win for everybody involved," he said.

Mr Murray is calling for special tender rules in circumstances involving native title holders and disadvantaged communities.

"I think it's very important that the Government is committed to fair and transparent and robust tender processes," he said.

"They need to find mechanisms where Native Title holders can become active participants in the assets in which they have a right.

"And that goes to both the design of the tender processes and the way in which they're conducted."

Government working to create jobs in Aurukun

In a statement, Queensland's State Development Minister Dr Anthony Lynham said the Government would continue working with Glencore and wants the bauxite mine developed for the jobs and opportunities it could create for Aurukun and the Western Cape.

Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk said the Government would work collaboratively on Aurukun's problems.

"On Friday, I will be going to Aurukun with the Police Commissioner, my Director-General, three senior government ministers to meet with the Mayor and the community," Ms Palaszczuk said.

Police numbers have been bolstered from eight to at least 17 officers, with more expected to arrive in the community within days.

Aurukun's teachers will not return to the community for six weeks, until the next term starts.