
Teachers flee Aurukun: Government criticised over jobs project

Reporter: Annie Guest
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MICHAEL BRISSENDEN: Teachers have once again been forced to leave the troubled community of Aurukun, and the Queensland Government is accused of being part of the problem.

Twenty staff members are being withdrawn after attacks on the principal, teachers' homes, and security guards.

The Premier will go to Aurukun tomorrow in an effort to find a solution.

But Noel Pearson's Cape York Partnership says the Queensland Government ignored an opportunity to create jobs for Aurukun when it overlooked a local company for a major mining tender.

It's calling for special tender rules for native title holders in disadvantaged communities.

Annie Guest reports from Brisbane.

ANNIE GUEST: Aurukun School is again closed after a second night-time attack on the principal and on teachers' homes.

The president of the Teachers' Union is Kevin Bates.

KEVIN BATES: What teachers have said to us is that anxiety levels are high and people were finding themselves under huge emotional pressure.

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

DUNCAN MURRAY: Part of the challenges we're seeing on the ground today in Aurukun are a function of the absence of jobs.

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

ANNIE GUEST: The tender to develop a large bauxite deposit was awarded to the multi-national Glencore in 2014, over a company called Aurukun Bauxite Development involving native title holders and a former Comalco CEO, that promised local jobs.

DUNCAN MURRAY: Large offshore mining companies paying royalties to traditional owners isn't the optimal way forward.

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

DUNCAN MURRAY: 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.

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

DUNCAN MURRAY: I think it's very important that the Government is committed to fair and transparent and robust tender processes and yes, 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.

ANNIE GUEST: The State Development Minister, Dr Anthony Lynham, was unavailable for an interview but released a statement saying the Government will continue working with Glencore and wants the bauxite developed for the jobs and opportunities it could create for Aurukun and the Western Cape.

The Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk didn't respond to the criticism but says the Government will work collaboratively on Aurukun's problems and has appointed a senior police officer to coordinate the solution.

ANNASTACIA PALASZCZUK: 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.

ANNIE GUEST: Aurukun's teachers won't return until at least next term, and distance education will be available to students instead.

Police numbers have been bolstered from eight to at least 17 officers.

MICHAEL BRISSENDEN: Annie Guest reporting.