

SECOND KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Wednesday 7 November at 9.00am

The Howard Government's Northern Territory Intervention: Are Neo-paternalism and Indigenous Development Compatible?

Professor Jon Altman

Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National
University, Canberra <jon.altman@anu.edu.au>

ABSTRACT

The Howard Government's dramatic intervention in Northern Territory Indigenous affairs was justified as a 'national emergency' that was the result of thirty years of policy failure. Draconian and non-discretionary measures that were introduced from 21 June 2007 were enshrined in complex Australian law in August 2007 with little debate. A three-phase neo-paternalistic plan has been canvassed as the cornerstone of the intervention: a twelve-month stabilisation period; four years of normalisation; and then an Australian government exit. This presentation will assess progress during the first four months of the 'stabilisation' phase; will question in what sense 'normalisation' might be an aspiration shared by the federal parliament and prescribed Indigenous community members; and ask if the notion of exit after five years is appropriate given that arguably it is state failure that generated what has been termed 'the emergency we had to have'. The presentation argues that a failure in state policy making for remote Indigenous communities, especially evident since the abolition of ATSIC in 2004, has created a policy vacuum that could have deleterious impacts for future Indigenous development in the NT. An alternative scenario that could still be taken before too much damage is wrought on Indigenous institutions and futures is canvassed as a concluding constructive contribution to Indigenous policy debates.