



S4W Lifelong  
Economic  
Wellbeing  
for Women



Australian Women's Coalition

**Barriers to Women's Employment  
Women and Recession Project**

**Darwin  
consultation notes**



Women**Speak**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Darwin consultation on the Australia Institute report *The Impact of the Recession on Women*<sup>1</sup> was facilitated by Michael Duffy (Northern Territory Council of State School Organisations), Shane Thamm (School for Policy and Social Research, Charles Darwin University), and the National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW).

The consultation was held on 26 October 2009 at the School for Policy and Social Research. Invitations were sent through the School and Mr Duffy to a range of local stakeholders. A copy of the invitation is at Attachment A; a list of attendees is at Attachment B.

## BACKGROUND

Darwin is the capital city of the Northern Territory (NT), a self-governing territory of Australia.

It is 3,391 kms from Sydney, reached by air or, more recently, by rail from Adelaide.

In March 2009, the population of the Territory was 223,079, recording a 2.2% growth since 2008. Net interstate migration in 2009 was 832. Net overseas migration was 641, compared to -47 in the December 2008 quarter. Annual population transience is estimated to be around 8–10% annually<sup>2</sup>.

The main population centres of the Territory are Darwin, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine.

About 55% of the population resides in the Darwin Statistical District, with the balance spread across the Territory. In June 2008, the Territory's

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<sup>1</sup> David Richardson, 2009, *The Impact of the Recession on Women: Background Paper*, The Australia Institute, viewed 12 January 2010, <https://www.tai.org.au/index.php?q=node%2F19&type=1&pubid=698&act=display>

<sup>2</sup> Data extracted from: Northern Territory Government, 2009, *Economic Brief: Population, March Quarter 2009*, viewed 22 January 2010, [http://www.nt.gov.au/ntt/economics/publications/economic\\_briefs/population\\_marqtr09.pdf](http://www.nt.gov.au/ntt/economics/publications/economic_briefs/population_marqtr09.pdf)

median age was 31.1 years, there were 101.7 males to every female; 23.8% of the population was under 15 years of age<sup>3</sup>.

Approximately 10% of Darwin's population are Indigenous residents, mainly members of the Larrakia Nation. Approximately 10% of the population comprises members and families from the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

Darwin has an extremely transient population. Between 2000 and 2006 there was a 46% population turnover<sup>4</sup>.<sup>3</sup>

In June 2008 the Territory recorded the nation's second highest median gross income, behind the Australian Capital Territory, reflecting the high proportion of the employed population providing government services. Government pensions and allowances were the primary income for 15.2% of households, the lowest in the nation, and 84.5% of households had at least one employed person, the highest in the nation<sup>5</sup>.

Aboriginal people make up 30% of the population of the Northern Territory; 38% of the Aboriginal population are children under 15 years. The Aboriginal population has a high growth rate, and is distributed between Darwin, nine main towns and 641 individual communities. The majority of the Aboriginal population does not have good access to mainstream services (health, education, housing)<sup>6</sup>.

Mining is the most important industry, estimated to produce around a quarter of the Territory's Gross State Product and is responsible for some 2,000 jobs. The unemployment rate in July 2009 was approximately 4%. In year-on-year terms, employment increased by 4.3% in the year to July

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<sup>3</sup> Data extracted from: Northern Territory Government, 2009, *Social Brief: Social Indicators, September 2009*, viewed 22 January 2010, [http://www.nt.gov.au/ntt/economics/publications/social\\_briefs/soc\\_ind\\_sept09.pdf](http://www.nt.gov.au/ntt/economics/publications/social_briefs/soc_ind_sept09.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Charles Darwin University, Population Studies Research Group, 2008. Distinguishing Darwin: Demography of the Capital', *Population Studies Research Group Brief, Issue 2008020*, viewed 22 January 2010, <http://www.cdu.edu.au/sspr/documents/Brief2008020DistinguishingDarwin.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Northern Territory Government, 2009, *Social Brief, op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 2007, 'A Snapshot of the Northern Territory', viewed 22 January 2010, [http://www.hreoc.gov.au/pdf/legal/seminars/snapshot\\_of\\_the\\_NT.pdf](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/pdf/legal/seminars/snapshot_of_the_NT.pdf)

2009. These data are highly volatile. Other important economic sectors are retail, pastoralism and tourism. Retail strong in 2009.

The mining sector is subject to boom and bust conditions – in early 2009 over 400 jobs were lost, in part because of increasing efficiencies in the mining operations, and in part because of downturns in overseas demand for specific minerals. Mining jobs are primarily out of Darwin, and workers fly in-fly-out on a fortnightly basis. There has been a significant reduction in such jobs recently, leading to some family and housing stress in Darwin.

Accommodation and housing present major concerns. There has been a remarkable development in Darwin of expensive high-rise apartment buildings, and very large homes, all high-cost. There has been minimal expansion of public housing. Social agencies report a severe shortage of affordable housing.

A significant number of transfers to the Territory are Defence Force families – there are extensive developments of Defence Housing, clustered in groups. Defence families, while supported through the ADF, have little if any connection with the surrounding community, and are without extended family support.

The issue of access to transport is a major concern. There is virtually no public transport in towns outside Darwin – Darwin has a municipal bus service. Air travel between the cities of Darwin–Tennant Creek and Katherine has been discontinued, and travellers must either drive, or take long distance buses. A young woman could be discharged from Darwin hospital with an infant having received treatment, and be put on a bus to Tennant Creek where she will arrive near midnight. There are no night time taxis in Tennant Creek.

Dialysis patients must transfer to either Alice Springs or Darwin, accompanied by their families – all requiring accommodation and access to school. There is little help with such costs.

Access to education services and levels of educational achievement vary considerably between main towns and remoter communities. Charles Darwin University – formed in 1973 through a merger of several earlier institutions – is a dual-sector university, enabling higher education study

(bachelor degrees to doctorates) and vocational education and training (VET) courses, from Certificate I to advanced diploma level.

## **SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION-POINTS**

The following points were made:

- There is a lack of NT legislation to assist women with school-age children to negotiate flexible, family friendly working hours
- NT salaries in community services don't match high NT living costs; short-term funding means people frequently change sectors, 'leave sector', or seek permanent employment out of sector.
- NT Working Women's Service (NTWWS) reported that they receive a very high number of complaints related to workplace bullying. Discussion suggested this is related to low levels of access to in-job training, high levels of staff turnover, and lack of corporate memory – all of which are related to a lack of management support.
- There is a lack of family and health services in regional and remote NT.
- There is a real problem of training for Indigenous workers without provision of employment pathways:
  - existing training models are inflexible
  - government supported job placement agencies are ineffective
  - access to urban employment for Indigenous workers is almost impossible due to lack of affordable accommodation, and gaps in training opportunities
  - the centralisation of key health services forces Indigenous families to leave their communities.
- There are real contrasts in work-place benefits – for example, in remote schools, non-local (white) staff have government provided housing, while locally recruited staff are not eligible for government assistance with housing. In consequence, many local school staff are living in houses with overcrowding (up to 20 people).



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## **POLICY ISSUES**

- The Commonwealth needs to revise training programs so that they are more flexible and personal as well as providing professional development.
- Training need to link to actual employment.
- More flexible learning opportunities need to be provided.
- Remedies are needed for poor transport to and between regional and remote communities.
- It is time for a whole-of-government approach which recognises the unique situations in the Territory.
- There is an overwhelming need for more child-care, including out of school hours and vacation care to assist women to engage in training and to participate in the workforce.

## REFERENCES

Australian Human Rights Commission, 2007, 'A Snapshot of the Northern Territory', viewed 22 January 2010,

[http://www.hreoc.gov.au/pdf/legal/seminars/snapshot\\_of\\_the\\_NT.pdf](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/pdf/legal/seminars/snapshot_of_the_NT.pdf)

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## **ATTACHMENT 1**

### **Attendees:**

Dr Tessa Lea – School for Social Policy and Research Charles Darwin University (CDU)

Joy Adams Jackson – School of Health Sciences CDU

Chris Spargo – School for Social and Policy Research CDU

Rollo Manning – RWM Consultancy

Naomi Porrovecchio – Office of Women's Policy – Pay Equity

Christa Hilton – Executive Director YWCA of Darwin

Graham King – NT Council of Sociak Services (NT CoSS)

Wendy Morton – Exec. Director NT CoSS

Cathy McMahon – School of Education CDU

Sue Emmett – School for Social Policy and Research CDU

Jenny Wolgemuth – School for Social Policy and Research CDU

Shane Thamm – School for Social Policy and Research CDU

Michael Duffy – NT State Schools Organisation

Anna Davis – NT Working Women's Service (NTWWS)

## ATTACHMENT 2

### Invitation

#### Charles Darwin University School for Social and Policy Research

*Research for positive social change*

Public seminar series 2009

### Marie Coleman consultation

Marie Coleman Chairs the Social Policy Committee of the National Foundation for Australian Women ([www.nfaw.org](http://www.nfaw.org)). NFAW has played a leadership role for national women's organisations in research and analysis of the impacts of the former WorkChoices and Welfare to Work policies on woman, and spearheaded the campaign which resulted in the establishment of the Productivity Commission Inquiry into a National Paid Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave Scheme.

#### Abstract

In this consultation, Marie wants to explore the local implications of the The Australia Institute's findings of the impact of the recession on women ([click here to download the report](#)).

Questions include: Is there any way some concerns can be addressed by local policy or program change, and which concerns require Commonwealth policy change?

Discussions could include local access to TAFE/VET, specifically for women who may be marginalised or among the 'hidden' unemployed; access to child care and Overseas Student Health Care; caring services (which could be an inhibiting factor for women wanting to study/join the workforce); and any other local knowledge about women's work-force participation which could inform national policy.

In this consultation, Marie wants to engage rural women, Indigenous, refugee and migrant women, as well as groups representing women more generally.

**Time:** 10:30am - 12pm

**Date:** Monday 26 October

**Where:** Charles Darwin University, Casuarina campus,  
building blue 3, room 12/13

**RSVP:** Shane Thamm: [shane.thamm@cdu.edu.au](mailto:shane.thamm@cdu.edu.au) | t: (08) 8946 6153

[Where is building blue 3? Click here to view CDU map](#)

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