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Media Release

**VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT URGED TO IMPLEMENT INDIGENOUS STOLEN WAGES
COMPENSATION SCHEME**

A leading academic researching the stolen wages of Indigenous people in Victoria has called on the Victorian Government to urgently develop a compensation scheme for Indigenous people affected by stolen wages practices.

Associate Professor Andrew Gunstone, from the David Unaipon College at the University of South Australia, has made the call in his article 'Indigenous Stolen Wages and Campaigns for Reparations in Victoria' published in the latest edition of the *Indigenous Law Bulletin (ILB)*.

He says the overall amount of wages stolen from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout Australia is extremely substantial.

“Given researcher Ross Kidd’s analysis of \$500 million owed to Indigenous people in Queensland alone, and even with three state government reparation schemes, the amount of wages, trust funds and social security benefits still owed to Indigenous people must run well into the hundreds of millions of dollars.”

Associate Professor Gunstone’s research—funded with grants from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and the Australian Research Council (ARC)—has uncovered a range of stolen wages practices in Victoria. He says Indigenous people often received either no wages or were systemically underpaid for their employment.

“They worked under harsh employment controls imposed by governments, their agencies and private employers. Any monies paid to Indigenous people were often compulsory paid into trust accounts by governments and their agencies—these trust funds were often mismanaged.”

Despite the significant amount of evidence of stolen wages practices on Indigenous Victorians, successive Victorian governments have failed to implement a compensation scheme.

“The State Government has not addressed the recommendation from the 2006 Senate Committee Inquiry into stolen wages to conduct archival research and consult with Indigenous people,” Associate Professor Gunstone says. “Instead, they have organised a very limited archival analysis—in both scope and archival sources—and failed to consult with Indigenous people regarding stolen wages practices.

To date the New South Wales (NSW), Queensland (Qld) and Western Australian (WA) governments are the only governments to have made formal offers of reparation to Indigenous people affected by the stolen wages practices. However, the Qld and WA schemes in particular

have been widely criticised as being manifestly inadequate in providing appropriate reparations to Indigenous people.

“The Qld scheme initially provided only between \$2000 and \$4000 to those Indigenous people born before 1957, who were still alive when the Qld scheme started on 9 May 2002, who could prove they had not received their wages and who would waive any future legal entitlements,” Associate Professor Gunstone explains.

“The WA process provided amounts of up to just \$2000 to those Indigenous people born before 1958, who were still alive, who could testify that monies had been not paid to them and who would surrender any future legal claims.”

Associate Professor Gunstone says stolen wages practices have significantly affected generations of Indigenous people.

“The failure of successive state and territory governments to halt the stolen wages practices has directly and significantly contributed to the extremely poor socio-economic conditions faced by many Indigenous people in Australia today.

“The archival research and community consultations into stolen wages practice in Victoria needs to be conducted urgently, given the poor health and older age of many Aboriginal people that have been affected by these practices.

To read Associate Professor Gunstone’s [article in full click here](#).

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