
Criticism levelled at PM after Indigenous corruption letter receives no response; Tony Abbott replies

By Jane Bardon
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A retired Northern Territory Country Liberals election campaign manager has questioned the Prime Minister's commitment to tackling corruption in Indigenous organisations after he did not receive a response to his letter which raised concerns.

Former Professor of Governance at Darwin's Charles Darwin University, Don Fuller, wrote to Malcolm Turnbull in September last year calling on the Commonwealth to more deeply scrutinise misuse of taxpayer funds by people ripping off Indigenous communities.

When Mr Fuller got no reply after three months, he wrote to former prime minister and Member for Warringah Tony Abbott, and received a response within a week.

"It did indicate to me just how serious Tony Abbott had been about his concern for significant social issues, such as Aboriginal issues," Mr Fuller said.

"I regret to say that I'm not convinced that the current prime minister has that deep desire."

Mr Fuller wrote to Mr Turnbull calling on him to tighten up Commonwealth scrutiny of the how the money it allocates for tackling Indigenous disadvantage is being spent.

"Those not within the Aboriginal ruling class have been forced to stand by helpless as a vast amount of new resources has been cornered by a few, often as a result of partnerships between senior Aboriginal 'Big Men' and white managers in Aboriginal communities," he wrote.

"It is the responsibility of government, particularly at the federal level, to ensure that 'pay-offs' involving taxpayer money, between 'Big Men' and senior white advisers, white managers and business interests are terminated.

"Codes of Governance relating to financial accountability have to be acted upon urgently.

"This should be monitored closely by the Commonwealth, to prevent the ongoing misallocation of resources."

PM staffer defends non-reply to letter

Mr Fuller said he was annoyed not to have received a response from the Prime Minister, who had just been elevated to the job at the time of his writing.

"I was extremely disappointed with that because I had had extensive experience in the area, and I had gone to considerable trouble to outline that," he said.

"There have been decades really of mismanagement, where the Government really has just turned a blind eye, so I was suggesting to the new Prime Minister that it was necessary to focus on codes of governance and particularly codes of financial accountability."

In response to the ABC's inquiry about why Mr Fuller's letter was not answered, a spokesman for the Prime Minister said the Government took non-compliance matters seriously and had a responsibility to ensure money was spent in accordance with funding agreements.

"The Government has in place rigorous compliance frameworks for organisations, including those funded under the **Indigenous** Advancement Strategy," the spokesman said. "Additionally the Strengthening Organisational Governance policy requires that organisations receiving \$500,000 or more in any single financial year under the **Indigenous** Advancement Strategy incorporate under Commonwealth legislation."

Mr Abbott replied in February to Mr Fuller that his letter was "full of good sense". "I am sorry that I am no longer in much of a position to shape policy and events but will continue to maintain a keen interest in **Indigenous** Australia and intend to spend another week in a remote community later this year," Mr Abbott added.