

Aboriginal leaders join attacks on Pearson

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NOEL Pearson is facing an angry backlash from other Aboriginal leaders over his strong support for the Howard Government's plan to seize control of indigenous affairs in the Northern Territory.

Veteran activist Mick Dodson yesterday said people should remember that Mr Pearson was "on the government payroll" and that while his intentions were good, his was not the only credible indigenous voice in the nation.

The attack came days after NSW Aboriginal Land Council chairwoman Bev Manton said Mr Pearson was "drunk with power".

The comments triggered a sharp response from Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough, who accused Mr Pearson's critics of "shooting the messenger".

Mr Pearson -- the director of the Cape York Institute, which receives federal funding -- has backed John Howard's plan to seize land from Northern Territory Aborigines for five years as part of efforts to restore order and end child abuse. He has argued that critics of the intervention plan are misinformed.

But Mr Dodson said the Government was relying too heavily on Mr Pearson's advice. "You've got to remember that Noel's on the government payroll, he has been recompensed handsomely by the Government, he's worked for the Government," he told ABC radio.

"But there's more than one Aboriginal voice in this country and they need to listen, and that's not what they are doing ... I'm absolutely sure he does (have the Aboriginal communities' best interests at heart) but there are other voices who raise legitimate questions."

Mr Brough said Mr Pearson's critics simply did not like what he was saying. "Noel Pearson's message is one of wanting to end the welfare dependence of indigenous communities and helping to build a positive future for indigenous people," he said.

"It's a sad reflection on people who attack those presenting a positive approach for the future."

Former ATSIIC chairwoman Lowitja O'Donoghue has told The Australian that Mr Pearson was upsetting many in his community and displaying arrogance.

Pat Turner of the Combined Aboriginal Organisations of Alice Springs, said there was no Aboriginal support for Mr Pearson's views beyond Cape York. "I just don't agree with his views," he said. "Much of what Noel comes up with is terribly expensive and unimplementable."

Mr Pearson could not be contacted last night.