

Elder backs income-management trial

Patricia Karvelas
Political correspondent

ABORIGINAL elder Tom Calma has backed a trial beginning in Western Australia on Monday under which parents whose children are considered at risk — in white and black families — will have 70 per cent of their welfare payments controlled.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, who has in the past been critical of welfare controls for indigenous communities, said the Rudd Government's approach in Western Australia her-

alded a new strategy. "This approach is to be applied in a non-discriminatory manner and with procedural rights maintained, so it removes some of the serious problems with the compulsory income-management scheme in the Northern Territory," he said. "And it is to be applied on the basis of the individual circumstances of families, so it has the capacity to be targeted to need. This is a preferable approach."

"Managing up to 70 per cent of a person's welfare is a significant imposition, and we will need to carefully monitor the impact this has on families."

"We have already seen unintended consequences in the NT, where 50 per cent quarantining affects the ability to pay fines, pay off loans and hire purchases and meet other essential needs."

Mr Calma said for the scheme to work, there needed to be proper engagement with communities and a full understanding of the scheme and what it was intended to achieve.

"The families likely to be affected by the scheme are already experiencing great hardship, and the scheme should not be about punishing them but instead about providing them the

assistance needed to ensure their children are fed, clothed and schooled," he said. "Any form of income-management needs to be accompanied by a suite of services to assist families — income-management, of itself, is a blunt tool to meet the challenges facing many people."

As reported in *The Australian* on Wednesday, welfare controls could be introduced across the country next year after the Government revealed it would adopt a national model from a choice of three systems under trial.

The West Australian trial of the

income-management measure will start in the Kununurra community in the Kimberley region and the Cannington district of Perth, covering several suburbs and 200,000 people.

The trial comes as a report commissioned by the Government suggests that Medicare officials, the Department of Immigration and the Family Court should be forced to hand over information to state welfare agencies to stop neglectful parents taking children from state to state.

The Government commissioned the report by the Allen Consulting Group on how the

commonwealth could better share information on child protection with the states and territories.

The report recommends widespread changes to the way departments communicate about children at risk. It suggests that while Centrelink is the first agency that needs to be opened up, a broader range of departments need to hand over information in order to protect children.

The problem of cross-jurisdiction cases of child neglect slipping through the system gained national attention in June when a 28-year-old woman was arrested in Adelaide and charged with

neglecting five of her children after the family had moved from Victoria.

Federal Family and Community Services Minister Jenny Macklin said the report recommends investigating the potential for information-sharing with other commonwealth agencies.

"Any changes to government procedures to facilitate greater information-sharing on children at risk will be subject to a privacy impact assessment," she said.

The report found child protection agencies reported only minimal contact with Centrelink, and indicated they were discouraged

from requesting information "because of perceived difficulties in getting a positive response".

It says that in developing a protocol on sharing information, Centrelink must review its guidelines, in particular the application of the legal thresholds to disclosure of information and the training of staff to ensure there is a good understanding of the issues.

"Child protection agencies emphasised the need, at any stage, for information to be provided quickly enough to be able to contribute ... during investigations and when orders are being made for a child," the report says.

Schools debate misses real issue ... funding



Struggling: Woonona Public School principal Terry Fisher, with pupils in his schoolyard, says his school has to make do with inadequate resources

Picture: Alan Pryke

Justine Ferrari
Education writer

A TYPICAL primary school receives less than \$2 a week per student to buy teaching resources such as readers, maths equipment, pencils, crayons, paper, art materials and sporting equipment.

For principal Terry Fisher, also president of the Wollongong Primary Principals Council in NSW, debates over league tables, accountability and public versus private schools miss the real problem in education — an extreme lack of funding.

Mr Fisher, principal of Woonona Public School, north of Wollongong, said schools in disadvantaged areas rightly received extra funding, but even typical schools such as his struggled with inadequate resources. "We are good at making do, at

surviving," he said. "But we shouldn't have to make do; we should be able to have the funds we need."

Woonona Public School is a middle-sized school of about 350 students from middle-class backgrounds with no real social or cultural disadvantage who perform above the state and national average in literacy and numeracy tests.

Of the funding from the federal and state governments, it receives about \$105,000 for operating expenses, including utilities, urgent minor maintenance, casual teachers, and student resources.

The amount allocated for utilities, \$24,000, is almost as much as the governments provide for student resources, about \$27,000.

When spread across the 350 students at Woonona, it provides \$76.62 a year for every child, or \$1.91 a week.

Any money not spent can be used by the principal in other areas, but Mr Fisher said little was left over.

In addition, the school receives special-purpose grants that are tied to specific programs covering learning assistance for struggling students, teacher professional learning and a computer co-ordinator.

A spokesman for NSW Education Minister Verity Firth said the state Government, which provided the bulk of funding for public schools, would spend \$11,000 on each public school student this financial year.

He also pointed out that the department paid for schools' big expenses, including teachers' salaries, capital works, major maintenance and cleaning.

Funding expert emeritus professor Max Angus from Edith Cowan University in Perth, who co-authored a

seven-year study into primary school resources, said some low-fee Catholic and independent schools would have even less than \$2 a week.

Professor Angus said part of the problem for Mr Fisher was the heavily centralised system in NSW, which restricted principals' decisions in how to spend their funding.

"Generally, about one-third of primary schools are doing OK and can do most of the things they're expected to; one-third find it tough to do everything, and one-third, mainly those in low socio-economic areas, can't deliver on all the expectations of schools," he said.

"Primary schools are very tightly funded; there is no fat."

Public school education for the next four years is expected to be finalised at the Council of Australian Governments meeting next week and

federal president of the Australian Education Union Angelo Gavrielatos said it provided an opportunity to redress the imbalance in funding of the public and private school sectors.

Mr Gavrielatos, who has written to the premiers and chief ministers ahead of the meeting, said private schools' funding was guaranteed with a bill before the Senate that continued the funding model of the previous government, of which about half all private schools were exempt.

"The bill includes the continuation of payments of \$2.7 billion over and above what private schools would be entitled to were the funding formula properly applied," he said.

"In the meantime, the suggestion is that public schools will have to carry the burden of the world financial crisis."

IN THE DARK

Americans' awareness of the epic *Australia*

	Total	Men under 25	Men over 25	Women under 25	Women over 25
Unaided awareness	5%	4%	3%	5%	6%
Aided awareness	60%	48%	64%	55%	71%
Definite interest in seeing	29%	19%	27%	25%	40%
First choice at box office	6%	2%	6%	4%	12%

Source: AdAge

Luhrmann film faces a hard sell in the US

Michael Bodey
Lex Hall

THE first US review of Baz Luhrmann's *Australia* has returned a positive verdict, with entertainment bible *Variety* calling it a luxurious, albeit bumpy, ride.

"Embracing grand old-school melodrama while critiquing racist old-fashioned politics, Baz Luhrmann's grandiose *Australia* provides a luxurious bumpy ride," the magazine said. "Like a Rolls-Royce on a rocky country road, it's full of bounces and lurches, but you can't really complain about the seat."

Research suggests *Australia*, starring Hugh Jackman and Nicole Kidman, could struggle to crack the US market. Audience research figures from Nielsen NRG show that only 5 per cent of Americans said, without prompting, that they were aware of the film and only 60 per cent of respondents said they knew about the movie when its title was mentioned to them.

It is believed research has shown 40 per cent of Australians, unprompted, are aware of the

film, an above-average result. Yet the gamba Sports and Entertainment Report says *Australia* is the most anticipated movie measured recently, beating strong performers *Indiana Jones 4* and *The Dark Knight*.

When prompted for titles last week, 62 per cent of Australians surveyed expressed interest in the film, well up on the 41 per cent result before last month and 50 per cent during October.

Movies are tracked by research companies continually, with unprompted, or "unaided," awareness crucial for determining the advertising budget.

The poor US results, as first reported in *The Australian* yesterday, present a challenge for the studio backing the film, Twentieth Century Fox, owned by News Corporation, which also owns *The Australian*.

The adaptation of the Stephanie Meyer novel about teenage vampires, *Twilight*, is turning into a surprise cultural phenomenon. *Twilight*'s major market is young women, the same demographic expected to drive *Australia* ticket sales.

Arts — Page 10

Teenager recalls excruciating pain inflicted by police Taser

Michael McKenna

THE shock of 50,000 volts hit her 50kg frame without warning.

Struggling under the weight of a policeman and two burly security guards, the Taser's "drive stun" blast on the 16-year-old's thigh felt like a knife was being driven up and into her stomach.

"It was so painful; it was excruciating and horrible and painful," the now 17-year-old, who cannot be named, told *The Australian*.

"It stopped my whole body from moving. I didn't expect it. I didn't know what a Taser was and then there was 'zap'. I was screaming and crying and I can sort of remember this police officer telling me that he had used a Taser."

The girl was hardly an innocent. The stream of profanities and threats that had poured out of her mouth at the two Queensland police officers minutes before had raised the heat of what should have been a routine confrontation with a pack of unruly teenagers.

All that changed when one of the officers — armed on the first night of an extended trial of the Tasers to general-duty police — appeared to breach operating guidelines that ban the weapon being used on a juvenile "except in circumstances where there is no other reasonable option to avoid the imminent risk of injury".

The April incident, which was captured on closed-circuit television, is the subject of an investigation by the police ethical standards unit and the state's anti-corruption watchdog, the Crime and Misconduct Commission.

The girl's mother told *The Australian* yesterday she would sue the police after charges of obstructing the officers

were dropped against her daughter in the Children's Court last Friday.

"She was no threat to those police," the mother said. "What they did to my daughter was disgusting. I was horrified when I saw the tape."

Queensland police have so far refused to release the CCTV footage to the girl's family and last week police prosecutors unsuccessfully opposed *The Australian's* covering the case in the Children's Court.

The incident has given weight to criticisms by lawyers and civil libertarians about the Bligh Government's announcement in January that it was going to arm more than 5000 frontline officers with Tasers, despite being barely six months into the trial.

It also follows NSW Ombudsman Bruce Barbour this week calling for a two-year freeze on further rollouts of Taser guns, saying police standards for their use were inadequate and the health risks unknown.

In Queensland, the CMC, which is helping to draft the final guidelines for the Taser rollout, last week wrote a letter accusing police of delivering a biased evaluation of the trial, which formally ended in June.

Speaking for the first time, the teenager said yesterday she was still stunned by how a Friday night out with friends had ended in court and a controversy that had attracted coverage around the world.

The trouble began, according to the girl, when a French tourist talking to the group tried to grope a friend and a fight broke out.

Security guards stopped the fight and then called an ambulance because one of her friends became dizzy. Police arrived and ordered the group

to leave, saying only one of the teenagers could remain to accompany her to hospital. They refused.

The CCTV footage shows a relatively calm standoff between the group and the two police officers and three security guards. After about 10 minutes, the male officer is seen reaching out towards the girl, who was sitting on the wall of a garden bed.

The policeman told the Children's Court the teenager had screamed "I'm gonna kill the bitch" to his female colleague, a claim denied by the girl.

"I had been yelling and swearing, but I didn't say that," she said.

"We just didn't want to leave because we wanted to make sure my friend got into the ambulance and got to the hospital. When he reached at me, I pushed his hand away and then I pushed down on the garden bed."

The footage shows another teenager lashing out at the male officer, and the 16-year-old girl kicking out as she lay in the garden bed, knocking the Taser off the policeman's belt.

The policeman then drove his forearm into the girl's neck to push her down on the garden bed. She sat back up and he pushed her down again.

"Then everybody started jumping on me; the policeman and the security guard and another guard who held my legs," the teenager said. "Then I felt the electric shock."

In the hearing, the police officer — who said he believed at the time that the girl was between 16 and 20 — conceded he might have breached guidelines.

"In hindsight, I can say yes, but at the time I didn't know she was a juvenile," he said.

Survivor 'devastated' at family drownings

Mark Schliebs
Angus Hohenboken

THE drowning of Shane O'Neill and his two young sons has left the man who tried to rescue them devastated, but relieved to be back with his partner and baby in Canberra.

Robert Brown, a 37-year-old employee of the Australian Federal Police's protective services branch, risked his life by diving into cold waters in Tathra, in southern NSW, in an attempt to save the family on Tuesday night.

Mr Brown was found by lifesavers underneath the wharf, struggling to stay afloat after the rescue attempt.

Police believe he had been fishing at the wharf and tried to help Mr O'Neill rescue his children after they plunged into the water.

Mr O'Neill and his sons, four-year-old Riley and 15-month-old Travis, drowned about dusk on Tuesday after the younger child's pram toppled into the ocean.

Police still do not know what caused the children to fall into the water. The wharf's only lifebuoy was locked inside a restaurant. Previously available buoys had not been replaced after being stolen.

Mr Brown told friends on Wednesday night he was glad to return to his family in Canberra.

"(I'm) finally home," he wrote on a social networking website.

"(I'm) a little scratched up, tired ... but so, so happy seeing the loves of my life." He later thanked his friends for their support.

In a comment posted online the morn-

ing after the incident, his partner Donna Sullivan said staff at the Bega Hospital told her that counselling would be organised for the distraught father.

"He is very scratched up and bruised, was in hospital for observation," Ms Sullivan said. "Mentally, though, he is devastated, and (he's) away from me and (our son) which doesn't help. I too am a bit of a mess admittedly."

Mr Brown told *The Australian* yesterday he was fine. "(But) I'm not going to make any comment," he said.

Far South Coast Local Area Commander Michael Willing said Mr Brown should receive a bravery award for his actions, a call echoed by NSW Premier Nathan Rees.

"I did manage to have a quick chat with him yesterday while he was being spoken to by detectives and he was very, very upset ... it was very difficult circumstances under that wharf, I can tell you," Mr Willing said.

Mr O'Neill's parents paid their respects to their son and grandchildren at the wharf yesterday, throwing flowers into the sea. Bunches of flowers also adorned the front of Kydd's Butchery in Bega where Mr O'Neill had worked for more than a decade.

Mr Willing said reports that Riley had climbed on the stroller or bumped it, causing it to topple off the wharf were speculation. Police divers yesterday failed to locate the pram, but retrieved a fishing rod believed to belong to Mr O'Neill.

Witness statements, including that of Mr Brown, said no one was watching exactly what the children were doing before they fell.

DYMOCKS
FOR BOOKLOVERS

DYMOCKS 2008 CHRISTMAS CATALOGUE PRICE CORRECTIONS AND CHANGE NOTIFICATION

- The price for *The Europe Book* was incorrectly printed at \$34.95 RRP instead of \$59.99 RRP. This book will retail at \$59.99 RRP.
- The RRP for *The Complete Robuchon* has been reduced from \$89.99 to \$79.99.
- The RRP for *Bond on Set: Quantum of Solace* has been reduced from \$59.95 to \$39.95.
- UBD 2009 Green Street Directories* RRP have been reduced as follows: Sydney from \$41.95 to \$39.95, Melbourne from \$28.95 to \$26.95, Adelaide, Brisbane & Perth from \$36.95 to \$34.95 & Motoring Atlas from \$29.95 to \$28.95.
- The RRP for *Watch Me!* has been reduced from \$19.99 to \$16.99.
- Two books are not available until 2009 (date TBA) *What are the Odds?* Bill Waterhouse & *The Complete Book of Blinky Bill* Dorothy Wall.

Dymocks would like to apologise for any inconvenience this has caused.

DECLARATION OF PROFOUND LOSS

We the undersigned:

**MOURN the loss of our children
TAKEN FOR ADOPTION**

**MOURN the loss of our families of origin
DENIED US BY ADOPTION**

**MOURN the loss of our brothers and sisters
CAUSED BY ADOPTION**

**MOURN the loss of grandparents
DENIED US BY ADOPTION**

**MOURN the loss of our rightful position in life
DECEED BY ADOPTION**

- Action for the Rights of Mothers and Children Organisation (NSW): whitestolengeneration@hotmail.com
- Adoption Loss Adult Support (ALAS: Queensland): a.l.a.s.g@gmail.com
- The Apology Alliance (Aust.) Please sign the petition at: http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/apologyalliance/
- Association Representing Mothers Separated from their Children by Adoption (SA): Freecall: 1800 110 800
- Association Representing Mothers Separated From their Children by Adoption (Vic) (03) 9769 0232
- Association Representing Mothers Separated from their Children by Adoption (WA) (08) 9312 1999
- Inter-Country Adoptee Support Network (ICASN): www.icasn.net.au
- Jigsaw (Qld) www.jigsawqueensland.com
- Mothers of the Stolen White Generation (Vic): babsrok@hotmail.com
- Sydney Post Adoption Support Group (NSW): chrissiehancock@hotmail.com
- WANISH (Vic) (03) 93288611
- Wollongong Links: (02) 4229 2687; www.reunitecards.com.au Mob. 0410422926

Post Adoption Resource Organisations:

- Adoption Research and Counselling Service Inc (ARCS) WA: (08) 9370 4914
- Adoption Jigsaw WA: (08) 9388 1922
- Adoption Information Services Counsellor for Anglcare: mia.bieske@anglcarevic.org.au
- NSW Post Adoption Resource Centre of the Benevolent Society (PARC): (02) 9365 3444
- Post Adoption Support Services (PASS), Relationships Australia SA (08) 8245 8100
- National Alliance of Natural Parents (NANP): If you are a natural parent, adoptee and/or support our initiative please contact: c.cole@uws.edu.au