



# Queensland Council of Unions

Working with Queensland unions who represent over 350,000 workers in Queensland on industrial, political and social justice issues

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## Unions say government wrong to claim no responsibility for stolen wages claimants

The Queensland Council of Unions has slammed the State of Queensland for claiming it has no responsibility to Aboriginal people whose wages were forcibly controlled by the state for decades.

The government has lodged its defence against the legal action which was undertaken on behalf of Uncle Conrad Yeatman in August this year.

QCU General Secretary Ron Monaghan said the Parliament enacted the legislation that allowed wages to be placed in the hands of a "protector" and in some cases, stolen.

"It's outrageous to hear that the State of Queensland claims that the protectors were not in a position of special trust and confidence to Uncle Conrad. It was *"The Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Act"* that provided for the protectors to take control of his wages.

"These laws indirectly allowed for the hard-earned wages of Aboriginal people to be stolen - seemingly forever. It's hard to believe that the government can now claim that it doesn't have a fiduciary responsibility after enacting such laws.

"These wages were taken out of the control of the workers who earned them by an act of parliament. The State of Queensland can't hide from this fact."

Mr Monaghan said the government had also claimed, in its defence, that it had been too long since the alleged acts took place and that any records that could have proved this case have been destroyed.

"The State of Queensland had a moral responsibility to keep accurate records of the acts of the Protectors. It is astounding that the State would now rely on the destruction of those records.

"This has just added insult to injury for Uncle Conrad and his fellow claimants. The Government should allow this matter to be determined on its merits. If the Protectors are found to have done the wrong thing, then the Government should pay Uncle Conrad fair compensation. They shouldn't be hiding behind legal technicalities.

"Uncle Conrad has been trying for years to have justice done and he now stands accused by the State Government of letting too much time pass.

"Uncle Conrad and his fellow workers should not be carrying the can for this. All the government needs to do is come good on its promise to pay these workers what was promised to them in 2002.

"Queensland unions will continue to fight for Uncle Conrad in his quest to gain wage justice for himself and all those workers whose wages were stolen."

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Media Release