

THE AUSTRALIAN Business

WITH THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

October 02, 2009 01:26am AEST

Contractors 'flouting' indigenous quotas in remote communities

Tony Koch | October 02, 2009

Article from: [*The Australian*](#)

THE federal and state governments are failing to enforce supposedly binding deals with contractors to employ locals to work on remote indigenous communities that reap the companies millions of dollars, an insider says.

Former Broncos rugby league player Brad Foster, who is a principal of Northern Project Contracting, said this was not only contrary to the terms of the lucrative contracts being let, but flouted the commitment by the Rudd government to "close the gap" between indigenous and white Australia.

Queensland Public Works Minister Rob Swarten yesterday pledged to follow up on Mr Foster's concerns, which have been brought to the attention of federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin by *The Australian*.

A spokesman for Ms Macklin said it was federal government policy that 20 per cent indigenous labour be employed on all housing projects in the communities.

Mr Foster's award-winning outfit was established in 2004 to get indigenous workers "job-ready" in the mining and civil construction industries.

The company won the 2008 and 2009 Premier's Smart Award in the Rising Star category, and since its inception has put several hundred young Aboriginal men and women into mining industry and construction jobs. Mr Foster said the Queensland government's policy insisting that government contracts on indigenous communities must provide for at least 20 per cent indigenous employment was largely misunderstood by industry and was being ignored.

He said there were no employment opportunities at the moment for trainees in the mining industry and NPC had tried to broaden into housing construction.

"We approached 11 construction companies in the north seeking a joint venture to take on the contracts for providing homes on communities and therefore provide employment with up to 60 per cent of the workforce we would use being indigenous people," Mr Foster said.

"But everyone knocked us back. Finally Glenwood Homes came in with us."

Mr Foster said NPC and Glenwood were competing for government housing contracts, but were costing in the minimum 20 per cent indigenous labour content to build houses "properly out of timber and bricks. But the contracts like at Yarrabah community are going to contractors providing prefabricated homes that require minimal labour, and certainly no jobs or training for indigenous people.

"It is no good continuing to fund social programs on communities: they are not self-sustaining. They are the programs that kill communities. We need real work, real infrastructure and a system where our people can achieve the skill levels necessary to do this work for themselves."

Mr Swarten said yesterday that if it could be proven contractors were not working to the quotas, he "would come down on them like a sledgehammer".

"The Queensland government policy required 20 per cent of labour employed in works on indigenous communities to be performed by local indigenous people, and there is a statewide policy which requires

10 per cent labour inputs by apprentices, trainees or cadets," he said.

"These policies are integral to all contracts for Queensland government-sponsored work and contractors must provide reports which demonstrate total compliance with the policies.

"Contractors sign up to these projects to provide opportunities for indigenous workers. If they are not fair dinkum, I want to know about it."

Copyright 2009 News Limited. All times AEST (GMT +10).

*All times are EST. © MarketWatch, Inc. 2008. All rights reserved. Subject to the [Terms of Use](#).
Designed and powered by [Dow Jones Client Solutions](#). MarketWatch, the MarketWatch logo,
BigCharts and the BigCharts logo are registered trademarks of MarketWatch, Inc. Dow Jones is the
registered trademark of Dow Jones & Company, Inc. Intraday data delayed at least 15 minutes.
"Intraday data is provided by [Interactive Data Real Time Services](#) and subject to the [Term of Use](#)."
FXQuote™ provided by GTIS, an Interactive Data Company "Historical and current end-of-day data
provided by [Interactive Data Pricing and Reference Data](#)". FTSE (Footsie) is a trade mark of the
London Stock Exchange and the Financial Times and is used by FTSE International under license.*