

Response from Dr Chelsea Bond, Associate Professor, University of Queensland:

As much as I am appalled at the alleged 'major investigation' of Channel Nine, the attempted to generate hysteria around how Palm Island residents spent their money is hardly surprising.

There is a long tradition of surveilling and controlling the income of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from withholding and/or stealing the wages of Indigenous peoples under Queensland 'Protection Acts' between 1930s through to the 1970s (income which many of our Elders have yet to receive), to the Commonwealth Development Employment Program, a race-based scheme in which Indigenous people were required to work for the dole that commenced in the mid 1970s, to the current welfare quarantine measures that were first applied to Aboriginal people in 2007 as an 'emergency measure' but which have now become a standard social policy approach.

What the Channel Nine report conveniently understates in its 'major investigation' is the reason for why the compensation was awarded. The reporter makes repeated references to 'riots' (I counted 11 in the online article) but just one reference to excessive force of officers which were deemed 'racially motivated'. Even if there was any truth to the reporter's claims about how the money was spent, it remains immaterial. Victims of violence, including racial violence at the hands of the state are entitled to spend the compensation how they please. After all they have been through, they deserve it.