

Alice town camps: Tilmouth hits back

This is an edited version of an interview by CAAMA Radio's Steve Hodder and Tangentyere Council CEO William Tilmouth defending his organisation's conduct in the town camp lease saga.

Hodder: what do you say to claims that Tangentyere is unaccountable?

Tilmouth: Those people who have a bent against Tangentyere obviously don't realise we are audited to the enth degree.

We are totally accountable for every cent we get.

If we had spent one cent out of place the government would have had every reason to take over Tangentyere.

We hold meetings we are informing people, we hold more meetings than as per our constitution and we're totally accountable.

For those people who have criticisms for us in favour of the Northern Territory Government do not realise that our accountability is better than anyone else's and I'm saying that in relation to the Northern Territory Government who has shown that their accountability is appalling.

They do not account for the monies that they get from the Commonwealth and they do not account to the people that they're supposed to serve.

Hodder: what about about claims that town campers are over consulted?

Tilmouth: There's no such thing as over consultation. It's very hard to take conceptions and legal conceptions to people whose only struggle in life is to get a feed that day or shelter that night.

It's very hard to get people to understand these legal terms, the jargons that they use. I don't think the consultation has gone far enough. Everything is a variation of what's gone before and this is just another variation to something we find very hard to comprehend. Why? Because the colour of our skin people feel like they can do what they like to do with us.

Hodder: Do you get sick of the same negative questions being asked year after year?

Tilmouth: What we do here at Tangentyere is stand up for the rights of our constituents.

We try forever and a day to get the best deal possible for our constituents so the damage is not as great.

We know the damage is going to be done, the closing of the gap as I said before is not about kicking people's heads in, it's about fixing up people's lives and if you've got to fix up people's lives by kicking them in the head then that's wrong.

You approach them and the consultation process has to happen at every level in order to get the work done.

You don't just come in and say well I've got an idea I want you to live by it now.

Why don't we just let Aboriginal people be Aboriginal because that's all they want.

Hodder: In the past couple of weeks we've seen the debate of some more controversial by-laws proposals in Alice Springs.

They seem to reflect that push of people being frustrated at not being able to solve issues but would rather use a stick than a hand up. Do you see it that way?

Tilmouth: I see it totally that way. For a society that lacks answers and solutions, their only solution is more of the same.

It's draconian, punitive action that they take.

We will fine people who are begging who are poor \$300. If people have \$300 they would not be begging.

This punitive approach to Aboriginal people to the Aboriginal problem is just resulting in possibly more jails being built in order to accommodate these people.

The jails are full. We have so many draconian, racist laws that govern Aboriginal people's lives in this town without giving them the freedom of choice.

Australia's quickly becoming known as the pariah state that South Africa was a few years ago and it's not something that I subscribe to but this is what's being driven because people who are in power who don't have the answers are just resorting back to the same old tried and tested approach of locking them up, getting them out of sight, putting them in jail, putting constraints on their lives that at the end of the day gives you every reason to drink.



Above: William Tilmouth at a CLC meeting at Titjikala in April

You are totally powerless in a world that is yours it's in a country that is yours, you are totally rendered powerless, every ounce of responsibility that you have in relation to your income in relation to your family, in relation to where you can drink, in relation to where you live, every responsibility is taken off you.

Hodder: Do you think that removal of the RDA – Racial Discrimination Act – and some of the policies involved in the current political climate actually do encourage a lot more racial tension?

Tilmouth: No doubt. I mean the attacks on Aboriginal people, the attacks on the way that Aboriginal people live and where they live and how they live and all that.

This just lends itself to the serious crime that happened recently, last week I believe in relation to a hate crime, which I think has the hallmarks of a hate crime.

Once you start lending and giving license to people to act the way that they see fit to act and take the into their own hands then at the end of the day all that legislation, all those policies give licence to that behav-

our and I think it's wrong and those people who are in power should realise the repercussions and the consequences of their decisions and say listen we're taking this country down the wrong road.

Let's not go down that road. Let's stand up and treat people like human beings and with dignity. Let's not be this pariah state that South Africa was.

At the end of the day the eyes of the world are watching Australia and we will be judged for it and Australia will be judged by history.

If someone is living in the creek because they are homeless that is the only place they have.

There is no accommodation for those people, there is no-one going along and lending a helping hand or offering something to those people.

All they get is criticism and criticism to the extent that their possessions, their blankets, their pillows, the only possessions that they have, they come back in the afternoon and their stuff is all gone, it's been dumped, it's been burnt, it's been taken away.