



MEDIA RELEASE

(For immediate release)

BE Law and Litigation Lending welcome record class action in-principle settlement in Queensland Stolen Wages case

Brisbane, 9 July 2019 – Cairns-based law firm Bottoms English Lawyers (BE Law) and leading litigation funder, Litigation Lending, today welcomed a record \$190 million in principle settlement in the long-running Queensland Stolen Wages case, saying it was an important step in the national reconciliation process.

The settlement, which is subject to agreeing final documentation and Court approval, was agreed to in principle this week by the Queensland Government and lawyers representing an estimated 10,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on whose behalf Hans Pearson, the lead applicant, was seeking to recover wages earned but alleged to be unpaid in the period 1939 to 1972.

It represents Australia's fifth-largest class action settlement and the largest-ever settlement involving Indigenous people outside Native Title claims. The case was run by BE Law and funded by Litigation Lending Services.

Commenting on the settlement, Mr Pearson said: "This has been a long 12-year road. I particularly want to pay tribute to my late wife Anna May Pearson who started this all off in 2007 by taking me in to see John Bottoms. Without her starting the ball rolling nothing would have happened. On behalf of the thousands of people who are now part of this settlement, I want to thank everyone who supported our claim."

Launched in September 2016, the Stolen Wages case rested on allegations that successive State Governments withheld wages of Indigenous workers that were paid to it as trustee. Workers and the descendants of workers who have since passed away will share in the settlement.

BE Law Special Counsel, John Bottoms, said the settlement was a long-overdue acknowledgement of the historic injustice faced by thousands of Indigenous people over eight decades.

"Addressing the Stolen Wages issue is an important piece in Australia's reconciliation puzzle. Many people don't realise that from the early 20th century to 1966 the wages of Aboriginal people in Queensland were paid to the State, which held those wages as trustee. The Queensland Government deserves credit for recognising this issue and electing to settle and the announcement is timely, coinciding as it does with NAIDOC Week," Mr Bottoms said.

CEO of Litigation Lending, Stuart Price, said: "Through their hard work and toil in harsh conditions, the Indigenous claimants in this case played a significant role in the development of modern Queensland. That they were denied wages during this time is an historic wrong, now rectified by this settlement. As a litigation funder aligned to social justice outcomes we are proud to have played a part in bringing this claim to a successful conclusion."

Prior to 1972 the working lives of Indigenous people in Queensland were heavily regulated by 'Protection' Acts that governed the conditions under which they were able to work, and gave the State Government significant power to manage and administer their wages.

The Stolen Wages claim alleged that the State of Queensland breached its duties as a trustee and fiduciary by withholding some of the wages of Indigenous people that were paid to it and other actions such as making unauthorised withdrawals and welfare fund deductions, failing to collect wages owing and failing to credit interest and investment income to the Trust.

In settling the claim the Queensland Government makes no admission of liability.

Further information can be obtained from the Stolen Wages website: www.stolenwages.com.au.

ENDS

Issued by Sefiani Communications Group on behalf of Litigation Lending and BE Law. Media contacts:

Nicholas Owens, Director
Ph: (02) 8920 0700
Mob: 0421 977 062
Email: nowens@sefiani.com.au

Shelly Tong, Account Director
Ph: (02) 8920 0700
Mob: 0406 467 058
Email: stong@sefiani.com.au

About BE Law

Turning 40 years old this year, Bottoms English Lawyers is a dynamic team of talented and dedicated solicitors having served primarily Far North Queensland clients with great vigour and enthusiasm. We have built a reputation as fighters for social justice, particularly involving Indigenous Australians. Over the decades we've acted for many Aboriginal Councils but even more importantly, we have achieved victories for thousands of Aboriginal claimants in our previous actions regarding under-Award wages, the Redress Scheme for dormitory residents, and having been instructing solicitors for the Thayorre-speaking peoples in the Wik case – prior to this historic achievement regarding Stolen Wages. Find out more at www.belaw.com.au.

About Litigation Lending

Established in 1999, Litigation Lending is a leading litigation funder in Australia and New Zealand. With two decades of experience, lawyers and industry experts trust Litigation Lending as one of the most experienced providers of finance to the legal industry. Litigation Lending takes pride in bringing a co-operative approach and working seamlessly with the legal teams and with industry experts. Litigation Lending has built a wealth of experience from having funded almost 200 matters with a win record of 94%. For more information, please visit: <https://www.litigationlending.com.au/>