

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**THURSDAY 17 SEPTEMBER 2020**

### **Unacceptable COVID risk in the Barkly**

AMSANT today expressed alarm that workers from COVID hot spot, Melbourne, have been granted an exemption from compulsory supervised quarantining and are living in Tennant Creek while working at a location in the Barkly.

AMSANT CEO, John Paterson, said the situation poses an unacceptable risk and has not been explained by the government.

“It has been made clear to AMSANT by the NT Government that no exemptions will be given from compulsory supervised quarantine for people from hot spots - even for critical health staff”, Mr Paterson said.

“AMSANT supports this stance as it follows the evidence of what we must do to protect our community from COVID-19.

“It is therefore hard to understand why this exemption has been given and why workers could not have been sourced from outside a hot spot”.

It is understood the workers have been given an exemption from compulsory supervised quarantine in Alice Springs or Darwin because their work has been classified as critical. They are working at a location 45 minutes out of Tennant Creek on the understanding that they only leave their accommodation to go to work or go to the hospital if they get sick.

“There are significant risks with this exemption”, Mr Paterson explained.

“We know from repeated experience that adherence to COVID safe plans and non-secure quarantine is not always 100%.

“The COVID-19 infection can be asymptomatic or so mild that people do not notice they are ill. It is unsafe to leave the identification of possible symptoms to individual workers.

“We also know the town of Tennant Creek is a high risk location. Over half the population is Aboriginal and experiences some of the worst health profiles and most crowded housing in the NT. COVID would likely spread very rapidly in the Aboriginal population and to remote communities in the region with devastating consequences.

“We are also concerned that appropriate risk mitigation has not been undertaken.

“What attempts were made to source workers from non-hot spot areas?

“Why aren’t the workers being accommodated at the remote site where they are working rather than in Tennant Creek?

“What testing and symptom screening of the workers is being done?

“These are questions that must be answered.

“We are also concerned that key health organisations such as Anyinginyi Health Service, were not consulted.

“On the face of it, this situation is totally unacceptable and requires an immediate response from the government”, Mr Paterson concluded.

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