

Critics want failure: Pearson

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ABORIGINAL leader Noel Pearson has hit out at critics of the Howard Government's plan to end child abuse in indigenous communities, saying he was "amazed" at the negative reaction to the radical policy.

He warned that ultimate responsibility for the success of the plan lay firmly with the Aboriginal people, and he said they needed to "take up the mantle" of self-determination if their communities were to heal.

Speaking on the ABC's Lateline program last night, Mr Pearson questioned the motives of critics of the Government's initiative.

"I am amazed anybody would put the protection of children secondary to anything, particularly when these children are subject to imminent abuse," he said.

"I think those who have objections to the imminent intervention have to ask themselves whether they are willing the exercise to fail.

"Those people are willing the protection and succour of Aboriginal children to fail in the same way and as vehemently as they are willing the failure in Iraq."

Mr Pearson said those who opposed the Government's intervention were not those within communities affected by child abuse and alcohol and drug problems, but rather people whose children "were sleeping safely".

"The people who are naysaying are people whose children sleep safely at night," he said.

Mr Pearson, whose proposals to withhold social welfare payments from abusive and neglectful parents have won bipartisan support, rubbished the suggestion that the Howard Government's plan was a smokescreen for a land grab.

"It's not about a land grab. It's about the scale of the neglect and abuse of Aboriginal children," he said.

But while many Aboriginal communities desperately needed immediate intervention, the problems afflicting them -- child abuse, binge-drinking and drug-taking -- would only be solved in the long-term if those within the communities took responsibility

for their own actions.

“The first and best defenders of Aboriginal children have got to be Aboriginal people. These are our children at stake,” Mr Pearson said.

“Ultimately, the solution to our problem will require us to pick up the mantle of responsibility ... because no one can save us as surely as we can save ourselves.”

Mr Pearson said he supported the Government's plan to ensure that welfare money was not spent on alcohol, drugs and gambling.

Aboriginal children were subject to a “living hell” because of their parents' neglect. “That day has got to come to an end,” he said.

Mr Pearson said there was scope for the creation of an indigenous body, similar to the former ATSIC, that would allow Aboriginal communities to “take responsibility” for their own affairs.