

Tuesday 12th May 2015

Unfair Budget has left Indigenous Affairs adrift

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights advocacy organisation ANTaR said that tonight's Budget failed the test of addressing the uncertainty, upheaval and cuts in Indigenous Affairs from the past 12 months.

National Director Andrew Meehan said that last year's Budget cut of \$534 million to Indigenous Affairs, followed by an open competitive tendering process as part of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS), had left Indigenous Affairs in disarray.

"This last year has been one of real anxiety for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities, and the Budget missed the opportunity to put that right," he said.

Mr Meehan welcomed the reinstatement of funding that was cut from Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services in last year's Budget, but said that these were just undoing some of the worst decisions of last year.

"It's positive that government listened to the public outcry over those cuts, which should never have been made in the first place, but it should have been working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their representatives on how to close the disadvantage gap from the start, rather than being pressured by the campaign to do the right thing," Mr Meehan said.

"It's high time that government respected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contributions to the development of policy, the design and development of service responses and the implementation of services as the central way to do business in this area."

"Cutting funding to the national representative body National Congress of Australia's First Peoples (\$15 million), the Torres Strait Regional Authority (\$3.5 million), and limiting the functions of other peak Aboriginal organisations so that they can't perform advocacy functions, doesn't amount to a new era of engagement."

Mr Meehan also said that it was time to elevate the importance of Indigenous Affairs in putting together the Budget.

"Across almost every social and economic measure, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the most disadvantaged and are far more likely to experience poverty than other Australians," he said.

"A Budget that doesn't put addressing this front and centre is not a fair budget. Nor does it demonstrate that Indigenous Affairs is at the heart of this government, as the Prime Minister has previously proclaimed."

On other measures, Mr Meehan said:

- "The failure to fully restore the \$130 million cut to Tackling Indigenous Smoking programs, and Closing the Gap Funding to previous levels, including the \$270 million cut from that which was committed for next three years for primary health care services and chronic disease, was deeply disappointing and would set back efforts to close the health equality gap."
- "The absence of a coherent whole of sector funding approach for vital Aboriginal Child and Family centres and the Secretariat of National Aboriginal Child Care that

could meet the demand for such services showed a lack of commitment to the vital sector.”

- “There has been no funding allocated to the commitment made by the Indigenous Affairs Minister to support the development of justice targets to address the skyrocketing rates of incarceration.”
- “Little consideration has been given to how mainstream measures such as changes to Super and Newstart announced in the Budget might impact on or benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.”

ANTaR is the only non-Indigenous organisation dedicated solely to supporting the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and working to educate the wider community, shape public opinion, and speak up for justice, rights and respect for Australia's First Peoples.

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