

Thursday 27 November 2014

Social Justice Commissioner's Report a call to action on justice issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights advocacy organisation ANTaR today welcomed the tabling of the Social Justice Commissioner's Report in Parliament and called for government to implement its recommendations.

National Director Andrew Meehan said it was a comprehensive and considered report into the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and it required government to take heed and act on it as a matter of urgency.

"The Commissioner's Report detailed a year that involved 'one of the largest scale upheavals in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs' with little or no involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and a cut of \$534 million," he said.

"It's time for government to recalibrate its approach and place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement at the centre of all that it does, to address some of the serious concerns the Commissioner has outlined," he said.

Mr Meehan said that of particular note was the strong focus on creating safer communities, especially in light of the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report released last week highlighting a crisis of skyrocketing incarceration.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are 15 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are around 24 times more likely to be in detention than non-Indigenous young people," he said.

"Government must listen to the Commissioner and act on this justice epidemic. We strongly support the recommendations to develop justice targets and a justice reinvestment approach," he said.

Mr Meehan said that the development of COAG Closing the Gap justice targets is critical to committing all governments to reducing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander incarceration, and that justice reinvestment would provide the circuit breaker necessary to address the root causes of imprisonment.

Mr Meehan noted that the Commissioner also set down a clear challenge to the Government 'to commit to a solid timetable' for the referendum to recognise the First Australians in our nation's constitution.

"The Report should provide the basis for government deliberations on how best to live up to its commitment to place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs at the heart of the government, including in relation to

incarceration, constitutional recognition, and the overall approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs,” Mr Meehan said.

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.