

MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 28th May 2014

Reconciliation in Parliament event showcases a new approach to reducing incarceration rates

Parliamentarians, Aboriginal leaders, and community members will gather in the NSW Parliament House on Wednesday evening to discuss a new approach to reducing Aboriginal incarceration rates.

The Reconciliation in Parliament event is a yearly forum hosted by ANTaR and the NSW Reconciliation Council to engage parliamentarians from across the political spectrum on reconciliation and addressing Aboriginal disadvantage in NSW.

National Director of ANTaR, Mr Andrew Meehan said that the focus on incarceration was because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in NSW are locked up at around 28 times the rate of other Australians.

“The rate has been growing and it has hit crisis level – it’s one of the most significant social justice issues in the country.” Mr Meehan said.

He said that Justice Reinvestment offers a new approach, it is cost efficient and benefits not only individuals but whole communities.

“We are seeing success overseas with Justice Reinvestment, it’s now time to see how it can work in Australia.” He said.

NSW Reconciliation Council CEO, Ms Kirsten Gray said “decades after the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, too many of our young people are still being locked up.”

“A new approach is clearly needed where gaol is truly the option of last resort.” Ms Gray said.

“Now is a good time to promote conversations about community empowerment and commit to a justice reinvestment approach.” She said.

ANTaR and the NSW Reconciliation Council welcomed the involvement of the Aboriginal Affairs Minister, the Hon. Victor Dominello and the Hon. Linda Burney, Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs who will be addressing the forum.

“Focusing our investment towards diversionary projects led by Aboriginal communities marries closely with the objectives of OCHRE, the NSW Government’s Plan for Aboriginal affairs, so I welcome this campaign,” Mr Dominello said.

“Key tenets of reconciliation are truth; social justice and the rights of First Nations People. Australia must continue to strive towards these things. Reconciliation is a journey not a destination.” Ms Burney said.

Mr Meehan said that he looked forward to the discussion and building on this bipartisan support to address the incarceration crisis for 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.

The New South Wales Reconciliation Council (NSWRC) is the peak representative body for reconciliation in NSW. Uniting communities and addressing the 'unfinished business' of reconciliation – recognition of rights, promotion of economic independence and social justice for Indigenous people.

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