

# MEDIA RELEASE



17 December 2013

## **Cuts to Aboriginal Legal Services will undermine action on Aboriginal jobs and education**

The proposed defunding of the peak body for Aboriginal Legal Services would undermine the Abbott Government's efforts to improve education and employment for Aboriginal people, according to ANTaR.

ANTaR National Director, Gary Highland said that defunding the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) would lead to more Aboriginal people going to prison and undermine efforts to improve Aboriginal community safety.

"Over the past decade the numbers of Aboriginal women imprisoned has increased by 59 percent and men by 35 percent. We need more action, not less from Government to turn this situation around," Mr Highland said.

The *Australian* newspaper reported today that the Abbott Government will defund the peak National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and all law reform and policy officer positions within each state and territory affiliate saving \$9 million over three years.

"The money saved will be a fraction of the damage done to Aboriginal families by neutering the legal peak body that represents them," Mr Highland said.

Mr Highland said that the Abbott Government has a genuine commitment to improving Aboriginal education and employment, but the continued high rates of incarceration are a major barrier to achieving its reform agenda.

"We won't give Aboriginal children a good education while they are 25 times more likely to be incarcerated than other Australian children."

"The fact that Aboriginal people are more than 18 times more likely to be imprisoned than other Australians is one of the major factors preventing participation in the workforce," he said.

"In order to turn this situation around we need to develop sound, evidence based policies. It makes no sense to defund one of the organisations that is best able to do this."

Mr Highland said that in recent years the leadership of NATSILS had significantly improved the professionalism and effectiveness of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal sector. These gains would be lost if the organisation was defunded.

The decision to defund NATSILS was also against the wishes of the Chair of the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council, Warren Mundine.

"We urge the Prime Minister to take this matter in hand and reverse the decision to defund NATSILS and the policy officer positions in state Aboriginal Legal Services," Mr Highland said.

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