

**MEDIA RELEASE**

9 November 2016

**Renewed attack on race hate protections is pure ideology**

National advocacy organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, ANTaR, expressed disbelief that government has established an inquiry to try to undermine protections against race hate.

Andrew Meehan, ANTaR National Director, said that the community had spoken very clearly in 2014 the last time government tried to wind back race hate protections, and government should take heed.

“Certain sections of the media, a few cross benchers, and members of the right of the coalition don’t like protections against race hate but the Prime Minister and Attorney General should show some backbone and stand up for decency against those ideologues,” he said.

Mr Meehan noted that the MPs and commentariat calling for changes to Section 18C of the Racial Discriminations Act, not only ignore the fact that it is qualified by Section 18D, but are people who will never be the targets of racial discrimination.

“Why are those people the experts on why protection against racial discrimination is not needed, and what is it that they are wanting to say that is not allowed under the Act?” he asked.

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience racial discrimination all the time. In fact, the State of Reconciliation report released earlier this year found that 33 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had experienced verbal racial abuse in the six months before the survey,” he said.

“The people attacking the protections against race hate should cease trivialising this experience which has very real impacts on health and wellbeing and the relationship between First Peoples and other Australians,” he said.

Mr Meehan also expressed deep concern at the unwarranted attacks on the Australian Human Rights Commission coming from government.

“The Prime Minister’s extraordinary attack on the Australian Human Rights Commission earlier this week showed little respect for the independence of the Commission and the critically important role it plays in protecting our human rights,” he said.

He noted that the Commission has an excellent record of conciliating complaints with 94% of surveyed parties reporting being satisfied with the Commission's service. Of the 80 complaints made under race hate provisions of the Racial Discrimination Act last year, only one proceeded to the court at the initiation of the complainant.

“This isn't the sort of record that warrants the Prime Minister throwing away the principle of independence when it comes to our national human rights institution,” he noted.

ANTaR is a foundational member of the Change the Record Campaign and is 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.