

Friday 26<sup>th</sup> March 2015

## Reversal of funding cuts to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services welcome

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights advocacy organisation ANTaR today welcomed the reversal of funding cuts to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) and called for longer term certainty for the vital sector.

Following the announcement today by Attorney General George Brandis that \$11.5 million would be restored to the ATSILS over two years, National Director Andrew Meehan said that the announcement would be a relief to the many services, employees, and clients of ATSILS.

Mr Meehan said the announcement follows a year-long struggle following May Budget cuts of \$13.4 million.

"It's an example of what the community can do when it stands alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations for a better deal," Mr Meehan said.

"We're still waiting for more detail to come out about any conditions placed on the funding and whether the national body (NATSILS) would be funded, but it appears that the government has accepted the calls made over the past year to reverse the funding cuts," He said.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services play an absolutely vital role in delivering frontline legal services to society's most vulnerable members, they make critically informed contributions to law reform, and help address the crisis levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' imprisonment, high rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system and growing rates of family violence," he said.

"Government should have been looking at increasing investment to this sector, not cutting funding, but the restoration of funding is positive," he said.

"A long-term increased investment in such services would help demonstrate that government is serious about its commitment to address the soaring rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander incarceration and creating safer communities, and would ultimately save government money," he said.

He also said that ANTaR remained concerned about the effect the uncertainty over the past year has had on the sector, as staff have left, and some services had been withdrawn because organisations had to make difficult decisions as the cuts became imminent.

"Government should work with the sector to ensure that these services are able to be reinstated and adequately staffed," he 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.*

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