

## Press Release

# 25 years of abject government failure must stop here

Today, on the 25th anniversary of the release of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Report, national advocacy organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights – ANTaR, called for an end to government indifference to addressing the nationwide incarceration crisis facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

National Director Andrew Meehan said “It has now been a generation since the landmark report was released. It clearly set out a road map for government to address Aboriginal deaths in custody including, most significantly, addressing the disproportionate rates of incarceration”

"25 years on it's a sad indictment on government that the identified key driver of Aboriginal deaths in custody, that of the disproportionate rates of incarceration, has not only not been addressed, but has gone backwards", he said.

At the time of the Royal Commission, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were 7 times more likely to be in prison than other Australians, today they are 13 times more likely to be in prison.

Mr Meehan said “If there is any greater example of government recalcitrance in social policy he is yet to see it.”

"Instead of taking heed of the Royal Commission's 339 recommendations in the lead up to this federal election what we have seen is a steadfast refusal of the government to even set a goal or target for reducing incarceration."

"Without setting a destination for policy in this area, government is doomed to repeat the appalling record of failure of the past 25 years on addressing this issue," he said.

Mr Meehan emphasised that instead of its head-in-the-sand approach, government must commit to a nationally co-ordinated approach to reducing incarceration that involves setting targets through the COAG process, and working in real partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations. As part of this, government should commit to establishing a body to monitor and report on incarceration rates nationally.

"Today is a sombre day, not only for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but for the nation as a whole, that should jolt our nation's leaders into real action on incarceration, in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People," Mr Meehan said.

"Today we should pause to remember the tragic deaths in custody that lead to the Royal Commission and reflect on the continuing deaths in custody such as Ms Dhu, Mr Langdon, Mr Ward and Mr Briscoe that continue to paint a disturbing picture of the justice system," he said.

ANTaR as a member of the Change the Record campaign is encouraging people to sign the Change the Record pledge in the lead up to the federal election.

*ANTaR is the only incorporated 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.*