

## Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

# Prime Minister hasn't listened to First Peoples on Royal Commission

National advocacy organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, today expressed dismay that the Federal Government hadn't listened to Aboriginal and Torres Strait organisations on the Royal Commission in the Northern Territory.

ANTaR National Director Andrew Meehan said that the Prime Minister had disappointed the sector following what was initially a positive response to the horrific scenes showing abuse at the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre in the Northern Territory.

"It beggars belief that the Royal Commission terms of reference weren't developed independently from the Northern Territory government, that it doesn't look in a focused way at the drivers of the high rates of Aboriginal youth incarceration, and that it doesn't involve a secondary inquiry into the disproportionate rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth incarceration nationally," he said.

Mr Meehan also noted the serious concerns raised by peak Aboriginal organisations in the NT at the appointment of Mr Brian Martin as Commissioner, given his previous role as NT Chief Justice presiding over all judicial officers who sentenced young Aboriginal people to detention, and his apparent ongoing role as additional judge on the NT Supreme Court.

"This draws into doubt the independence of the Inquiry before it even starts. Those NT organisations should clearly have been consulted by the Prime Minister," he said.

Mr Meehan noted that more than 100 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and community organisations called for the inquiry to:

look at the underlying factors driving engagement with the justice system;  
ensure an Aboriginal representative from the NT is formally involved; and  
conduct a further national inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth incarceration to be held.

"The new Federal government has started its term not listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, on such a horrific issue. It's just not acceptable," he said.

Mr Meehan said that the Australian public were shocked and horrified at the images depicted on Monday night, and many were left asking why the Federal government hadn't shown interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth incarceration.

“We’ve been making the point very clearly for years now that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are locked up at 26 times the rate of other young Australians – why hasn’t doing something about this national issue been of interest to the Federal Government,” he said.

“The Change the Record Campaign of which ANTaR is a foundational member has developed a comprehensive Blueprint for Change in this area that the Federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs hasn’t even responded to.”

“It’s time for this to change. Government must start engaging with, and listening to, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, or we’ll continue to preside over the crisis that sees young First Peoples locked up and abused in prison,” he said.

## **About**

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. ANTaR is a member of the Change the Record campaign, people can take the Change the Record pledge to show their support for addressing the incarceration crisis of First Peoples - <https://antar.org.au/webform/change-record-pledge>

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