

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Time for Aboriginal youth incarceration to be of interest to the Federal Government

ANTaR, national advocacy organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, today called for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth incarceration across the country to become a priority for the Federal Government.

ANTaR National Director Andrew Meehan said that he was astounded at reports that the Federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs had commented that his 'interest wasn't piqued' prior to Monday's Four Corners program on youth detention in the Northern Territory.

"For years, ANTaR and countless other organisations have been calling on the Federal Government to play a leadership role in reducing the crisis rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth incarceration, including supporting smarter and safer approaches rather than locking children up," Mr Meehan said.

"The Federal Minister and Federal Government have shown little or no interest in heeding those calls. It's time for that to change," he said.

Mr Meehan noted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are incarcerated at 26 times the rate of non-indigenous young people.

"Surely that must pique the Federal Minister's interest, surely he should want to reduce that rate," he said.

Mr Meehan repeated his call made yesterday that the Royal Commission announced by the Prime Minister should focus on the Don Dale abuse to bring the perpetrators to justice, and document the system failings and incidences of abuse in the NT, and it should report back quickly.

"There's clearly a need for the Government to act swiftly in relation to the horrific incidences of abuse, torture and systems failure in the Northern Territory that were depicted on Four Corners."

Mr Meehan emphasised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives should be consulted on the terms of reference, and supported the clear calls from NT Aboriginal organisations that the Royal Commission should be independent from the Northern Territory Government.

Additionally there is no reason that the Royal Commission should preclude a further inquiry that focuses on youth incarceration at a national level.

“This isn’t an either/or choice. With an incarceration rate 26 times that of the rest of the youth population, it is clear that we need an inquiry into the over-incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people across the country,” he said.

Mr Meehan reiterated that the Change the Record Campaign, of which ANTaR is a foundational member, had developed a Blueprint for Change to reduce incarceration rates of First Peoples, and there is much the Federal Government could do now.

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>