

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PM, engage with First Peoples from the start

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights advocacy organisation, ANTaR today called for the Prime Minister and Federal Government to start engaging with, and listening to First Peoples before making decisions.

ANTaR National Director Andrew Meehan said that the resignation of Mr Brian Martin as Royal Commissioner for the Royal Commission into the Child Protection and Youth Detention Systems of the Northern Territory just 100 hours after being appointed, demonstrated the need for a new relationship of engagement.

“Last week many Aboriginal representatives, including from peak organisations in the Northern Territory, requested that they be engaged in the development of the terms of reference for the Royal Commission.”

“It’s extraordinary that this consultation didn’t happen on such a matter of importance, and unsurprising that there was a lack of confidence in the announced Royal Commission from those organisations,” he said.

Mr Meehan said that it was clear from the outset that an Aboriginal person should be at least one of the Royal Commissioners on this issue.

ANTaR therefore welcomes today's announcement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda as a co-Commissioner with Justice Margaret White AO to lead the Royal Commission.

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioner Mick Gooda has been an extraordinary advocate for First People’s rights for many years, is respected by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and all sides of parliament, and will bring great expertise and experience to the role,” he said.

Mr Meehan said that he was shocked that the appointment of an Aboriginal Commissioner hadn’t been considered at the outset, and reiterated that proper engagement with First Peoples would have made the need for such an appointment crystal clear.

He noted that in the Closing the Gap speech earlier this year, the Prime Minister committed to not ‘delivering to’, but instead ‘working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and their communities’.

"The process last week flew in the face of that commitment and the government needs to urgently establish good engagement from the start of its term"

Mr Meehan further noted that genuine engagement had been the centrepiece in the historic Redfern Statement made during the Federal Election Campaign.

“All of the national peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations led by National Congress, and signed by some 50 organisations including ANTaR, made it clear that engagement was critical to closing the disadvantage gaps and addressing the unfinished business of reconciliation,” he said.

“The Redfern Statement and the call for real engagement to start in the first 100 days of government is an opportunity for the Prime Minister and Government to reset the relationship with First Peoples.”

“Few issues could have made that need for engagement clearer than what has transpired over the last week,” 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>