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## High lock-up rates rile NT lawyers

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Increased policing under the federal intervention in the Northern Territory has led to a dramatic rise in the number of people being sent to jail, a Senate inquiry into remote Indigenous communities has heard.

The North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency told the inquiry, which is being held in Darwin, that the Northern Territory now hands out three times more prison sentences than the national average.

NAAJA representative Helen Wodak says there is a gross under-utilisation of non-custodial sentences in Territory courts.

A Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service officer, Mark O'Reilly, says there has been an increase in police charging people with a range of offences but the penalties were mostly jail terms or fines, with very little in between.

He says this has resulted in a surge in the number of people being jailed for driving offences as well as for serious criminal charges.

The director of the Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission, Suzan Cox, QC, has told the inquiry she has not seen a sentence for a community work order in a remote community in years.

"We really need a lot more officers out in the communities where people can do community work orders," she said.

"I haven't seen anyone do a community work order for years.

"They just don't get them."