

**North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency Ltd**

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**More needs to be done to reduce NT’s prison numbers**

NAAJA welcomes the NT Government’s announcement that the NT prison population is growing slower than previously expected.

While this is welcome, it needs to be seen in perspective. The NT’s imprisonment rate is still 5 times the Australian average and close to the highest in the world. At 30 June 2013, the Northern Territory imprisonment rate of 821 prisoners per 100,000 adult population was next followed by Western Australia at 256 prisoners per 100,000 adult population. We have a long way to go before we are even on the same field, let alone kicking goals.

Moreover, the proportion of Aboriginal people in Australian jails vastly exceeds that of non-Aboriginal people. While Aboriginal people make up 30% of the Northern Territory population, 86% of adults in prison and 99% of young people in detention are Aboriginal.

“The Northern Territory Government needs to start measuring the effectiveness of their law and order policies, not just numbers of people being locked up. Territory taxpayers deserve real accountability for the millions that we are spending on law and order ”, said NAAJA CEO, Priscilla Collins.

‘It costs more than $100,000 to jail one person for one year and $200,000 to lock up a young person for a year. This is draining money from areas like health and education and is failing to make our community safer because it is not addressing why people offend’ said Ms Collins.

It is also far too early for the Government to suggest that policies like alcohol protection orders (which only came into effect in December 2013) are leading to reductions in the prison population. The Government’s own statistics note that “fluctuations should not, of themselves, be interpreted as changing trends in crime. The crime statistics are also subject to influence from changes in legislation, public behaviour in reporting crime and Police operations. Care should be used in attributing annual changes to a particular cause”

This Government is also responsible for mandatory sentencing laws, which national and international evidence conclusively shows does not reduce crime and only see more people going to jail and for longer. NAAJA calls on the Government to commission independent, public evaluations of policies like alcohol protection orders and mandatory sentencing for violent offences.

“NT prisons are at crisis point. If the Government is serious about reducing crime and breaking the cycle of offending, it is time for them to commit to justice targets to reduce the NT’s prison population and crime rates”, said Ms Collins.

“More resources are needed at the front end and as alternatives to jail, to target the causes for offending before people become entrenched in the justice system,” said Ms Collins.

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