

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

An alliance of the CLC, NLC, CAALAS, NAAJA and AMSANT

MEDIA RELEASE

Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT's Response to the Royal Commission Interim Report

Let's Get It Right This Time

Monday 3rd April 2017

APONT welcomes the Interim Report from the Royal Commission and Board of Inquiry into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory. The Interim Report, which has gathered evidence from a wide range of witnesses, clearly demonstrates our people face a system which, in the words of the Commission "reveals a youth detention system that is likely to leave many children and young people more damaged than when they entered."

Critics of the Royal Commission have claimed that "we already know this" and that it has been a waste of time and money. This is not the case. The Commission has demonstrated a system which is broken, and in urgent need of radical reform. As the Commission has pointed out:

It is a stark fact that the Northern Territory has the highest rate of children and young people in detention in this country and the highest rate of engagement with child protection services, by a considerable margin.

A total of 94 per cent of children and young people in detention and 89 per cent of children and young people in out-of-home care in the Northern Territory are Aboriginal. The extent of this over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people, compared with all other children and young people, including Torres Strait Islanders, compels specific consideration of their position.

Again, as noted by the Commission, we have had over 50 reports and inquiries into issues covered by the Inquiry, dating at least back to the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody and the Bringing Them Home inquiry. We absolutely support the Commission's position that:

*there is community concern that this Commission's recommendations and report will, like those before it, be shelved without leading to action and change. **This must not happen.***

While the Interim Report does not make specific recommendations, it is clear that it will seek a balance between those who are concerned about community safety and reform that will lead to better outcomes for our young people in avoiding the effects of intergenerational trauma and involvement with the legal system.

We welcome this approach. We need a greater emphasis on rehabilitation and restorative justice that will lead to safer communities for all of us.

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