



NATSILS
NATIONAL ABORIGINAL & TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER LEGAL SERVICES

MEDIA RELEASE

7 February 2017

A Government sanctioned “shake-up” to Youth Justice

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (NATSILS) expresses deep concern regarding Monday’s announcement by the Victorian Government to change the management of the Youth Justice System from the responsibility of the Department of Health and Human Services to the Department of Justice and Regulation. This announcement appears to fit within a suite of so called ‘tough-on-crime’ measures implemented to hastily address the incarceration of children in Victoria.

On Monday, this week, the Victorian Government identified the shift in responsibility as a necessary “shake-up” that would better manage and rehabilitate young offenders.

‘These youths have already been shaken up and traumatised beyond what is required to rehabilitate’, said NATSILS Co-Chair Cheryl Axleby.

Ms Axleby identified the Governments action as facilitating a shift toward a punitive model of youth justice.

‘When young people come into contact with the criminal justice system, they must be treated differently from adults. Young people must receive care that prioritises their rights and needs as children’, said Ms Axleby.

Only last week, NATSILS received news that Victorian prison guards had been using capsicum spray to subdue juvenile inmates. Alarming, the use of both capsicum spray and extendable batons had been endorsed by the Victorian Government who identified such measures as necessary to maintain order at Parkville and Malmsbury youth detention centres.

‘The permitting of capsicum spray and extendable batons in youth detention by Government is a dangerous and unnecessary measure that fails to properly consider the root causes of juvenile offending and the rights of children directly involved’ said Ms Axleby.

Ms Axleby warned that if state Governments continue to pursue punitive measures to control youth in detention facilities, they can expect youth justice outcomes similar to those that erupted at Don Dale Youth Detention Centre and produced images that horrified a nation and triggered a Royal Commission.

Ms Axleby noted the importance of Government policy to prevent a situation similar to Don Dale.

‘Victoria need only look to the Northern Territory Governments response to rectifying the brutal mistreatment of youth inmates at Don Dale- a decision for which they did not require findings of a Royal Commission to implement. In response to incidents reported at Don Dale, the Northern Territory Government changed the management of Youth Justice from the responsibility of the Northern Territory Correctional Services to Territory Families. This is a decision Victoria should be very aware of before attempting to “shake-up” its Youth Justice System’ said Ms Axleby.

Media Contact: Karly Warner at kwarn@vals.org.au or by phone on 0423 610 587