



NATSILS

**NATIONAL ABORIGINAL & TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER LEGAL SERVICES**

MEDIA RELEASE

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NATSILS joins over 100 organisations calling on Malcolm Turnbull to broaden the Royal Commission

Today the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) joined with over 100 organisations, including other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak representative bodies, in an open statement calling for the Government to broaden the recently announced Royal Commission into the abuse of children in detention in the Northern Territory.

“It is vitally important that the government use this opportunity to investigate the entire youth justice system in the Northern Territory” said Wayne Muir, co-chair of NATSILS.

“It is clear that the Northern Territory Government has known about the abuse in their youth detention centres for a long time and that they have done nothing to put an end to it. The people who committed these acts against children and those who allowed them to continue for so long need to be brought to justice. That is why it is important that the Royal Commission be established independently of the Northern Territory Government.”

The open statement calls Government to ensure that the terms of reference be developed in consultation with the Northern Territory Aboriginal organisations and youth justice sector, and should:

- Encompass the entire Northern Territory youth justice system, not just issues relating to detention facilities;
- Examine all previous enquiries relating to youth justice and investigate why the recommendations were not implemented;
- Not limit how far into the past the Commission can inquire;
- Ensure the inquiry is completed promptly and that the Government commits to implementing all recommendations;
- Be conducted entirely independently from the Northern Territory Government; and
- Be chaired by an appropriate expert and must have Aboriginal representation from the NT.

The Statement calls for the Royal Commission to conduct a broader investigation as a second step across all Australian State and Territory jurisdictions, including a focus on the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the justice system.

“We need to change the way that we deal with youth justice in Australia. There are too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children that are cycling through the system. We need immediate action from Government to support the work of agencies such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services to implement early intervention services that divert these kids away from the system.”

NATSILS supports immediate action from the Federal government to protect the rights of people in custody, including prioritising the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and immediately ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture.

“There are things that the Federal Government can do now that will protect the fundamental rights of people in custody, including the implementation of OPCAT. This week has demonstrated that despite the passing of 25 years, the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody remain painfully relevant.”

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