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NATSILS MEDIA RELEASE: South Australian Government’s “barbaric” use of spithoods on children exposed by Ombudsman must end immediately, says NATSILS

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (NATSILS) has condemned the spit-hooding practices used on primary school aged kids in a South Australian youth prison. Photos and findings of mistreatment, abuse and breach of human rights, reminiscent of Don Dale, have been exposed by the findings of the South Australian Ombudsman [released in a report today](#).

“I am horrified that the horror of Don Dale is repeating itself, despite a Royal Commission, right in our backyard in Adelaide,” said Cheryl Axleby, NATSILS co-chair.

The report considered 459 incidents of the use of force at Adelaide Youth Training Centre between October 2016 and June 2019; 12 per cent which involved the use of a spithood. The report found that South Australia is the only jurisdiction to authorise the use of spithoods.

“These barbaric spithoods were used on kids as young as 12. One third of the spithood incidents were used on the same child, forced to wear a spithood 19 times in 9 months. Groups of 5 or 6 guards are seen in the photos pinning down children to force spithoods onto them.”

“At the time, 62% of kids in the centre were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander kids. The treatment depicted in the images is inhumane and sickening,” said Ms Axleby.

“This is not how you treat children in government care. Our kids deserve better. Our kids should be happy, connected with culture, in their communities, with opportunities to thrive. Yet these primary school aged kids were treated worse than animals. They were pinned down and subject to risk of asphyxiation, which would cause immense trauma.”

NATSILS calls for the immediate ban of the spit-hooding practice, for accountability for the staff involved, an apology from the South Australian Government and for reparations for children where their human rights have been breached.

The report also found:

- Concerns of the “number of staff and level of force used in several of the incidents” including “a dispute over bedtime should not result in a 13 year-old child being pinned to the floor and handcuffed” and “12 members of staff to congregate around and then enter a child’s cell for the purpose of enforcing a unit transfer.”
- “All but one incident reviewed by my investigation involved a child being pinned to the floor by several members of staff.”

- “One incident involved a child being held and handcuffed in the prone position for a cumulative period of 26 minutes. Restraining an individual in the prone position introduces a risk of asphyxiation.”
- One photo depicts five staff members pinning down a 13-year-old child as a spithood is forcibly applied to the child.
- Another photo depicts a young child on his knees, wearing a spithood, as three staff restrain him and remove his handcuffs in an isolation cell.
- Procedures and policies were “out of step with most other Australian jurisdictions and inconsistent with international best practice.”

END OF RELEASE

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The report is found [here](#).