

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

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

Aboriginal Peak Organisations

Youth Justice Review

Submission July 2011

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO (NT) appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Department of Justice's current review of the Northern Territory (NT) Youth Justice System. We note that the review is broad ranging and crosses several Ministerial portfolios including Justice, Children and Families, Correctional Services and Police.

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Formed in October 2010, APO (NT) is an alliance between the Northern Land Council (NLC), the Central Land Council (CLC), the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT), the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) and the Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service (CAALAS).

APO (NT) is working to develop constructive policies on critical issues facing Aboriginal people in the NT and to influence the work of the Australian and NT Governments. As representatives from peak organisations in the Northern Territory, we share the aim to protect and advance the wellbeing and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. We also aim to provide a representative voice for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory and to enable effective communication and information distribution between and within communities and Aboriginal organisations.

APO NT formally endorses the contents of the submissions from CAALAS, NAAJA and AMSANT.

Youth Justice in the Northern Territory

Collaborative efforts within and between government departments and non-government organisations along with young people, their families and legal and other relevant service providers need to be made immediately in order to address the grossly disproportionate involvement of Aboriginal young people in the youth justice system. Aboriginal people make up over 90% of the population of young people in custody in the Northern Territory,¹ and evidence suggests that current approaches to youth justice are ineffective.

Incarceration is not an effective measure for preventing offending behaviour in young people, nor does it provide any assurance that young people are provided opportunities to learn, succeed or become valued members of society. Disturbingly, overrepresentation of Indigenous juveniles and young adults is worse now than it was twenty years ago when the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody report was published.

¹ Northern Territory Department of Justice, *NT Correctional Services Annual Statistics 2008-2009* (2009) 8
www.nt.gov.au/.../NTCS%20Annual%20Statistics%202008-09_EBook.pdf

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APO NT recommends that focus is instead directed towards a youth justice system which is youth-specialised, community-driven and culturally responsive.

We refer to the submissions made to the Youth Justice Review 2011 by NAAJA, CAALAS and AMSANT. As identified in these submissions, it is vital for the review panel to consider the evidence based, practical ways in which the youth justice system can be improved. It is also imperative to consider the perspectives provided by Aboriginal people who have been involved in the youth justice system.

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