

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

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

MEDIA RELEASE

Maintain Court's discretion - Therapy not "throw away the key"

3 July 2013

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory [APO NT] has today joined the Chief Magistrate in condemning the lack of programs for alcohol and drug dependent offenders in the Northern Territory.

"APO NT is calling on the NT Government to immediately re-evaluate its approach to sentencing offenders with drug and alcohol problems," said APO NT Spokesperson Mr. Noel Hayes.

"This week the Chief Magistrate Hilary Hannam quite rightly pointed out that after the scrapping of the SMART Court,

We have now nothing in the court system, not a single program, not for drugs, not for illicit drugs, not for alcohol, not for mental health, not for Indigenous people."

As the Chief Magistrate lamented this puts us behind all other states and territories.

"Instead of supporting medically sound treatment options for alcohol dependent people before the courts, the NT Government has introduced Alcohol Mandatory Treatment laws to detain people who have committed no crime.

"Instead of building on successful programs that address the underlying causes of offending, the NT Government continues to use prison as a first resort.

"Governments in the NT have been pursuing 'tough on crime' policies for decades, while rates of crime and imprisonment continue to rise. The number of young Aboriginal people in our prisons is a national disgrace.

"APO NT believes the Government's strategy should include more diversionary options for courts. We call on the NT Government to introduce properly resourced, evidence based programs to help people break the cycle of offending and reoffending," said Mr. Hayes.

For further information, contact Roslyn Cook, Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service on 08 8950 9300 or 0412 835 519.