

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

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

MEDIA RELEASE

Royal Commission: 'do it *with* us, not *to* us' NT Aboriginal organisations write to PM

The Northern Territory's main Aboriginal land councils, medical and legal services have written to the Prime Minister, urging him to keep the Royal Commission into juvenile justice at arms' length from the Giles government because it is part of the problem under investigation.

The coalition of peak NT Aboriginal organisations also asked the PM to honour his word and do things *with* rather than *to* Aboriginal people by involving them in the development of the commission's terms of reference.

"We urge you to ensure that Aboriginal people and organisations are fully engaged in the process and that it is one that is entirely independent of the Northern Territory Government," the letter states.

The coalition, which represents the vast majority of Aboriginal people in the Territory, yesterday led calls on the Australian Parliament to dismiss the Northern Territory Government over the abuse of children in detention.

"We do not make this call lightly but any government that enacts policies designed to harm children and enables a culture of brutalisation and cover-ups, surrenders its right to govern," the organisations write.

"In relation to the Royal Commission we would also like to make these specific requests of you:

1. Ensure that the Northern Territory Government has no role in the development or oversight of the Royal Commission, including the provision of funding or developing the terms of reference. We can have no confidence in the Northern Territory Government, given not only its protracted inaction in relation to the matters raised, but also the manner in which the public has been actively misled in relation to events.
2. The Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory (APO NT) be given an opportunity to comment on the draft Terms of Reference.
3. That the Royal Commission be chaired by an independent expert and must have Aboriginal representation from the NT.
4. The terms of reference must necessarily be broader than the incidents exposed in the Four Corners program. It is vital that it considers issues closely related to the treatment of young people in detention, including:
 - legislation and policies that underpin the treatment of young people in detention, including the use of force and isolation;
 - the over-representation of Aboriginal young people in detention, especially on remand;
 - the role of the Department of Children and Families in caring for Aboriginal young people who come in contact with the criminal justice system;
 - the need for specialist approaches to the policing of young people;
 - the availability of trauma support and counselling for Aboriginal young people in the community;
 - examine all previous enquiries relating to youth justice in the NT for cover ups and

- uncover why the recommendations were not implemented; and
not limit how far into the past the Commission can inquire.

5. It is imperative that Aboriginal organisations are properly funded to provide support to people in connection with the Royal Commission, including legal representation and counselling.

The letter thanks the PM for his leadership in recognising the national importance of these issues.

The APO NT letter is signed by David Ross and Joe Morrison on behalf of the Central and Northern land councils, Priscilla Collins and Eileen van Iersel on behalf of the NT Aboriginal Legal Services NAAJA and CAALAS and John Paterson on behalf of the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the NT, AMSANT.

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A copy of the letter is at <http://www.clc.org.au/publications/content/apo-nt-letter-to-pm-re-royal-commission/>

Media contact: Elke Wiesmann, media@clc.org.au, 0417 877 579