

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

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

MEDIA RELEASE

Mini-budget cuts to Aboriginal services will increase harm and cost more — especially in the Bush

9 December 2012

The Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT says the recent mini-budget cuts to Aboriginal directed services like child protection, family and parent support, homelessness services and youth support are a false economy.

AMSANT CEO John Paterson said the cuts will lead to increased preventable harm and cost the community more in the longer term.

“These actions will result in increased avoidable harm to Aboriginal people in the NT and will contribute to increasing, rather than closing, the gap on Aboriginal disadvantage,” said Mr Paterson.

NAAJA CEO Priscilla Collins said that the slashing of the budget for SAF,T, the Aboriginal child protection body, will particularly impact on services aimed at supporting families and parents and preventing children entering the child protection system.

“Although we recognise the need for a culturally sound Aboriginal out-of-home care service, prevention rather than crisis management should be the focus in relation to child protection, especially given the growing cost of funding child protection and out-of home care,” said Ms Collins.

Ms Collins also noted that the funding cuts to SAF,T appeared to be in direct contrast to an undertaking by the Chief Minister, given to the Northern Land Council at its Full Council meeting on 14 December, to protect SAF,T’s funding.

“The result of removing Larrakia Nation’s Night Patrol, Return to Home, Photo IDs, Transport, Case Management and Prisoner Support Service will be increased numbers of homeless Aboriginal people on Darwin’s streets, and more interactions between Aboriginal people and Police. This will exacerbate the problem Government is trying to fix,” said Priscilla Collins.

“The abolishing of the Smart Court and Alcohol and Other Drugs Tribunal also removes additional avenues for diversion and treatment for people and will increase the rate of Aboriginal incarceration. Cuts to youth services and inadequate funding for implementing the Youth Suicide Report recommendations will impact very negatively in that area,” said Ms Collins.

“Considering the Government was elected on the Aboriginal ‘bush vote’, the inadequate funding for homelands, and cuts to patient air-transport services to the bush are also of great concern,” John Paterson said.

“Sadly it is a case of reap what you sow. We understand funds are short, but this government could really get off to a good start by using the opportunity to put a long term fix in place for the people who voted it in,” Mr Paterson said.

Interviews/information:

Sarah Barr on 0487 341 117