



NATSILS

**NATIONAL ABORIGINAL & TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER LEGAL SERVICES**

MEDIA RELEASE

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The loss of a unified voice for Australia's First Peoples will deliver a devastating silence

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (NATSILS) is disappointed that the Federal Government will not demonstrate their commitment to the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples (National Congress) to unify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations across the country.

The National Congress is an independent and representative body - a national voice, a leader, an advocate and a source of advice and expertise for all Australians. The National Congress membership is made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and organisations from across the country. Those members democratically determine the voice of the National Congress.

NATSILS' Chairperson Mr Wayne Muir said, "The lack of commitment to a unified voice for Australia's First Peoples will deliver a devastating silence in this country. We should be facilitating a voice that fosters collaboration and solution focussed approaches".

Through the participation and decision-making of their members, the National Congress can collaborate to defend the rights and protect the unique heritage of the First Peoples of Australia. The National Congress strives for equality, freedom and opportunity. The National Congress are focused on our Peoples' ability to make decisions and to control our lives and communities.

"We call on the Federal Government to commit to supporting peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices to allow community controlled organisations and front-line service delivery expertise to inform policy development and to improve key strength indicators for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples", said Mr Muir.

The National Congress is a fledgling organisation and have been subject to funding uncertainty over a number of years.

National Congress Co Chair Rod Little said, "We represent only 3% of the population and have over 8000 individual members. We represent over 180 organisations from one of the lowest socio-economic groups in the country. I think that it's pretty impressive that we have done this well for such a young organisation, ".

NATSILS' representative at the National Congress is Mr Dennis Eggington, Chief Executive Officer of the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia. Mr Eggington, a Nyungar man, is an avid and informed defender of the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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