



NATSILS

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

MEDIA RELEASE

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Good intentions aren't enough to close the gap

Today the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) invite Prime Minister Tony Abbott to match his good intent with firm commitment and action.

NATSILS Chairperson, Shane Duffy, said that the Prime Minister has demonstrated his best intent towards addressing the disadvantage faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples but that what is needed now is turning good intentions into strong leadership and real action.

“Mr Abbott has repeatedly talked about his commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and has demonstrated such by moving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs into the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet where it can receive the attention it requires,” Mr Duffy said.

“While these initial steps are good signs that his intent and commitment are genuine, we are now reaching the point where the public are expecting greater leadership and definitive action.”

Mr Duffy said that the Government, led by the Prime Minister, needs to drive real change in a way that previous governments have failed to before, and recognise that addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage cannot be siloed amongst different areas of government service delivery and that addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander incarceration rates is as critical a part of the equation as progress in education, health and housing if we are to ever ‘close the gap’.

“Recent Commonwealth Government reports such as the Doing Time – Time for Doing report which followed an inquiry into the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth in the criminal justice system, as well as non-government experts have all argued that progress in the other areas of the Closing the Gap policy program will not be achieved unless action is taken in the justice space,” Mr Duffy said.

“The Safe Communities Building Block of Closing the Gap is the only area that does not have a national partnership agreement with targets to ensure that funding is committed to enable action, that such action is nationally coordinated and that identified outcomes are achieved”.

Mr Duffy said that prior to last year's election, all major political parties gave bipartisan commitment to introduce Closing the Gap justice targets in relation to reducing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander incarceration rates, but that the Coalition had started to step back from this commitment recently.

“We are disappointed that the Government has wavered from their previous commitment and call on the Prime Minister to honour his Government's promises and

commence consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts from relevant sectors to design appropriate justice targets and the priorities for an associated national partnership agreement,” Mr Duffy said.

“Mr Abbott has an opportunity to show some real leadership here and while we recognise that progress will not be made overnight, what we need from the Prime Minister is long-term vision, steadfast commitment and action that goes beyond good intentions.”

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