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Media Release

NATSILS welcomes the announcement that the Turnbull Government will ask the ALRC to examine factors leading to overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the prison systems but calls for more immediate steps

As the peak body for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services, NATSILS welcomes the announcement as Federal leadership is vitally important to drive a national, holistic and whole-of-government strategy to address imprisonment, violence, and the rates of children removed from their families.

“It is essential that the terms of reference reflect the important role that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services will play in this inquiry and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations must be meaningfully engaged and consulted adequately to reiterate the things we’ve asked for time and time again”, said Mr Wayne Muir, NATSILS Co-Chair.

“There is, and has been for many years a national crisis occurring for our people and the ever quickening rate at which they are imprisoned and the Government could take immediate steps such as committing to Federal Justice Targets, the development of an intergovernmental agreement and re-committing to the recommendations of Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody”

NATSILS has long called for an intergovernmental commitment in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and community controlled organisations to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system.

While the government’s announcement is welcomed, it is occurring at the same time that the funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, the very services that are ameliorating the mass incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, is being reduced in real and actual terms.

“The legal assistance sector is working on the front line every minute of every day to prevent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other vulnerable people from entering the prison system but without adequate funding we are forced to turn a number of our most vulnerable children, women and men away”

“We know that interaction with the criminal justice system is strongly linked to social and economic disadvantage, and so to address imprisonment rates we need all levels of governments to invest in education, health, disability, housing, employment, legal assistance and other community driven programs”, Mr Muir concluded.

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