



EMBARGOED until 12am Wednesday 14 September 2016

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services Meet in Alice Springs united in their calls for the safety of children in Central Australia to be a priority

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice leaders from across the country meet today on Arrernte country after receiving reports that this week children in Central Australia have been remanded in circumstances that would amount to breaches of the Youth Justice Act.

“Children differ from adults in their physical and psychological development, and their emotional and educational needs. In all actions concerning children, including those in a court of law, the best interests of the child must be paramount. The fact that there is no Youth Justice Court in Alice Springs is outrageous” said Cheryl Axleby, Co-chair of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services.

“If Central Australia and the regional areas had a separate Youth Justice Court, perhaps we wouldn’t see children held in circumstances that would amount to a breach of the Youth Justice Act”

Representatives from every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service are calling on the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments to be proactive to ensure that children in Central Australia are safe and cared for in environments that are consistent with their needs.

NATSILS calls for the development of a separate court for all Youth Justice matters to be established in Alice Springs and regional areas and for processes to ensure separation from adult proceedings.

“A holistic, resourced, and coordinated Youth Justice Court should be implemented in the Alice Springs as part of a system which aims at reducing young people’s involvement in the criminal justice system”

The proposed separate court for Youth Justice matters must be serviced by appropriately trained practitioners including designated Youth Justice Magistrates, prosecutions and defence practitioners.

Australia ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in December 1990. This means that Australia has a duty to ensure that all children in Australia enjoy the rights set out in that treaty.

Ms Axleby said that it was telling that the recent focus on the treatment of young people in detention, including a number of children from Central Australia, came at a time of significant cuts to funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services throughout Australia.

“It is astounding that the Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service is still facing ongoing funding uncertainty and that there is no separate court for Youth Justice Matters in Alice Springs and the regional areas”, concluded Ms Axleby.

For media enquiries, please contact Karly Warner 0423 610 587

NATSILS

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) is the peak national body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) and represents the following ATSILS:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (Qld) Ltd (ATSILS Qld);
- Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement Inc. (ALRM);
- Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) (ALS NSW/ACT);
- Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia (Inc.) (ALSWA);
- Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service (CAALAS);
- North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA);
- Tasmanian Aboriginal Community Legal Services (TACLS) and;
- Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Limited (VALS).

NATSILS members have over 40 years' experience in the provision of legal advice, assistance, representation, community legal education, advocacy, law reform activities and prisoner through-care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in contact with the justice system.