



NATSILS

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL & TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER LEGAL SERVICES

MEDIA RELEASE

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Funding cuts a ‘blow to the heart of the justice system’: NT Chief Justice

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) has called on the Prime Minister to intervene to prevent funding cuts that the Northern Territory Chief Justice has said will “strike a blow to the heart of the justice system”.

In a speech at the Opening of the Northern Territory Legal Year, Northern Territory Chief Justice Trevor Riley said that funding cuts to “vital” Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services due to take effect from 1 July 2015 will “strike a blow at the heart of the justice system.”

NATSILS Executive Officer, Eddie Cubillo said that Chief Justice Riley’s comments laid bare the long-term effects of the funding cuts.

“These cuts will have a devastating impact for our services and the ability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access justice,” Mr Cubillo said.

Chief Justice Riley said that “it is obvious” that funding cuts to frontline legal services “will not save money in the long run.” His Honour observed that “Unrepresented litigants and under-represented litigants will lead to significant increases in costs” for the courts, prosecution and prisons.

Chief Justice Riley urged “the responsible governments, Federal, State and Territory, to take great care to ensure that any necessary cuts in funding do not have adverse consequences for the delivery of justice in Australia and do not lead to greater problems elsewhere”.

NATSILS call on the Commonwealth Government to reverse funding cuts to Aboriginal legal services.

“The warning of the Chief Justice of the Northern Territory must not be ignored” said Mr Cubillo.

“The Commonwealth Government must urgently reconsider the long-term effects of cutting the funding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services around Australia. The Prime Minister has declared his special interest in Indigenous affairs and we call upon him to intervene to prevent this ‘blow to the heart’ of the justice system – a blow we know will be felt most strongly by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people” Mr Cubillo said.

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