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MEDIA RELEASE:

Last week, the Federal Government released a response to the 226 recommendations contained within the Final Report of the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory ('the Royal Commission').

Whilst the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) welcomes the Federal Government's commitment to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children within the child protection and youth justice systems, the NATSILS urges the Federal Government to take responsibility to invest in and resource the delivery of the Royal Commission's recommendations.

The NATSILS have continuously advocated that the Royal Commission's findings should not be read in isolation and have called upon the Federal Government to urgently recognise the work of the Royal Commission and its relevance to the youth justice and care and protection systems of all States and Territories, which have been the subject of numerous inquiries and reports detailing significant reforms necessary to care and protection and youth justice systems.

"The findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission provides the Government with a unique opportunity to take a lead role in instigating long overdue change to transform the crisis of youth justice and child protection in the Territory and across Australia", said NATSILS Co-Chair Cheryl Axleby.

"Investing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led solutions, including ATSILS, guarantees meaningful change for our children and our communities. The Federal Government must make an immediate commitment toward investment in community controlled organisations that deliver front line services which have the direct impact of reducing our children's contact with the justice system. Simultaneously the Government must ensure that it fulfils its responsibility to provide basic universal services such as health, housing, education and welfare to ensure children are healthy, happy and strong in their communities", said Ms Axleby.

The NATSILS have also called upon the Federal Government to learn from previous mistakes regarding responses to reform youth justice and child protection systems.

"As the Royal Commission noted, a profound shift from past practice is key to ensuring immediate and necessary reform of a broken system that has unfairly targeted, traumatised and criminalised our children and families. If we are to transform the current system that has permitted the abuse and mistreatment of our children, the Federal Government must act to immediately and adequately resource urgent reforms", concluded Ms Axleby.

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