



NATSILS
National Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Legal Services
TRUE JUSTICE FOR OUR PEOPLE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

3 August 2021

NATSILS Media Release - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services condemn new Federal charity laws that threaten our self-determination and endanger the delivery of much needed legal services for our people

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services from around the country have banded together to condemn the Federal Government's proposed new charity laws that pose a very serious threat to self-determination and risk the functioning of their already severely under-funded and under-resourced services.

Alongside service delivery, many Aboriginal Legal Services publicly advocate across a range of issues, such as deaths in custody and raising the age of criminal responsibility. The laws will give power to stifle this advocacy, and silence the voices of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people they represent.

Aboriginal Legal Services are charities. Limited by insufficient and restrictive government funding, they rely on fundraising as a means to continue delivering much-needed services and advocacy. Threatening the charity status and fundraising ability of our services would further restrict Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's ability to seek justice.

"Our legal services across the country and the thousands of people they represent and advocate for must not be silenced. Protecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination means that our people can access culturally safe legal support justice when and where they need it, which as we know supports our communities and reduces the over-incarceration of our people.

This nation and its leaders still perpetuate so many injustices against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and it is our right to speak out against them. It is our duty to advocate for the changes that will create a fairer, freer and more equitable Australia." - **Priscilla Atkins, NATSILS Chair**

By way of illustrating the extreme extent of the powers these new laws will impose, a charity could be deregistered if an ALS employee attends a rally organised by another group opposing the high rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody and temporarily obstructs traffic, or if an organisation speaks out against a Minister's proposed discriminatory policies.

An alliance of Australia's most well-established and respected charities, [Hands off Our Charities](#), including ACOSS, Amnesty, Save the Children, Oxfam and People with Disability Australia have also spoken out in unity and in condemnation against the new Government regulations that will target and

shut them down for advocating on behalf of their communities on matters of public interest. They called for the laws to be immediately withdrawn.

NATSILS Members include:

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services
Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement
Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT
Tasmanian Aboriginal Legal Services
Aboriginal Legal Services Western Australia
North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency

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