



National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anglican Council

A response to the abuse of children at Don Dale Youth Detention Centre

NATSIAC members watched in horror the 4 Corners report which detailed the abuse suffered by children being held at Don Dale Detention Centre. We as a body resolutely condemn all forms of abuse toward children and welcome the Royal Commission which has been established by the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments.

We also welcome the standing down of retired Supreme Court Judge Brian Martin and the subsequent appointment of Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda and former Supreme Court Judge Margaret White. It is vitally important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians voices are heard during this Royal Commission, and the appointment of a prominent Aboriginal as co-commissioner is a good first step to ensure this.

As noted by the Primate of the Anglican Church, Archbishop Philip Freier, in his response to this issue, in the Northern Territory, 97% of youth held in detention are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. This is despite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people comprising only 17% of the total population in the Territory. This is an appalling statistic, and this hugely disproportionate incarceration rate must be addressed as part of the Royal Commission, these children would not have been abused as we saw in those images if they had not been in custody. For this reason, NATSIAC also resolutely condemns mandatory sentencing, and calls on government, rather than forcing our children into detention facilities, to instead spend the money wasted on locking kids up on providing diversion programs, and family support programs to help prevent our children ever getting to the prison system.

NATSIAC also notes the growing body of evidence which points to this kind of abuse not being isolated to Juvenile Detention centres within the Northern Territory and so we call upon the Prime Minister to broaden the scope of the Royal Commission to include all juvenile detention facilities Australia wide. Whilst acknowledging this will greatly lengthen the time required for the Royal Commission, it will also ensure a full review of the systems which appear to be greatly letting down our nation's children – and disproportionately our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

NATSIAC acknowledges that any Royal Commission is only as good as the implementation of its recommendations. With this in mind we urge government to commit to the full implementation of all recommendations resulting from this Royal Commission.