

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Royal Commission must ensure the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples**

National peak bodies SNAICC and NATSILS have called for the forthcoming Royal Commission into institutional child sexual abuse to use the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as the basis for its work and ensure the effective engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

NATSILS Chairperson Shane Duffy said it was critical the Royal Commission's work was framed by human rights principles "so that the special and unique rights of children are at the forefront of everyone's minds throughout the inquiry and to ensure that well-established human rights standards are applied."

According to SNAICC and NATSILS, the Terms of Reference should specifically include the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people who were forcibly removed by past policies of state and Commonwealth governments and placed in institutions, those in state care and those in detention.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a long and traumatic history with both public and private institutions," Mr Duffy said.

"The Royal Commission provides an important opportunity for those who were placed under their authority to obtain recognition for the abuse that was commonly perpetrated against them. It will also contribute to a process which we hope will bring about improved policies to prevent such abuse occurring in the future and more robust responses to ensure accountability when it does."

Ensuring the effective participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims in the Royal Commission should also be a priority according to SNAICC and NATSILS.

"Cultural competence is a well-recognised principle when it comes to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and hence, the appointment of an appropriately qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioner or Commissioners would go a long way to facilitating the equal participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims in the Royal Commission," Mr Duffy said.

In addition to a Commissioner, SNAICC and NATSILS also recommended that engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims, in particular those in remote areas, could be promoted by allowing victims to give evidence directly to the dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioner, ensuring access to interpreters when needed and taking guidance from the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

According to SNAICC and NATSILS, the commission should also consider the establishment of reparations tribunals for victims of child sexual abuse while in state and public institutions, as well as provide counselling and other support services for victims and their families.

SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams said the Royal Commission faced many challenges, including arriving at recommendations that sought to heal at the community level.

“Understanding the extent of the abuse and the levels of cover up is important, although the victim/survivors of the abuse already know much of this. The real challenge will be finding ways forward, to heal individuals, to heal communities and to heal the past so that people can move into the future with a strong sense of resolution,” Ms Williams said.

“For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the systematic society wide destruction, denigration and impoverishment, generation after generation the task of healing will be more complex and take longer than for most.

“Given that for Aboriginal people, individuals cannot be separated from family and family from community, the commission needs to talk about redress and the long journey ahead for restitution for whole communities, not just the individuals most directly involved.”

SNAICC and NATSILS have lodged a joint submission on the Consultation Paper on the Establishment of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The submission can be viewed at [www.snaicc.org.au](http://www.snaicc.org.au)

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