



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

MEDIA RELEASE

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Draft human rights plan needs major overhaul

SNAICC has warned the Australian Government that its Draft National Human Rights Action Plan ignores the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care and will not substantially advance human rights in its current form.

“SNAICC is seriously concerned that the draft plan’s section on the human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is silent on the protection of our children, who are 10 times more likely to be placed in out-of-home than other children,” SNAICC Chairperson Dawn Wallam said.

“We urgently need a human rights-based approach to reduce the alarmingly high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being removed from their families and to increase the chances of children in child protection remaining connected with their families and culture.”

Ms Wallam said SNAICC applauded the Government’s intention to create a comprehensive roadmap for sustainable change in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. But the draft plan lacked specific targets, new initiatives and a process for monitoring progress.

“Without targets and new measures the plan lacks commitment and will be no more than decorative,” she said.

“If left unchanged, Australia will miss a great opportunity to advance basic human rights for all Australians. And it will continue to draw criticism from bodies such as the United Nations.

“SNAICC asserts that, in the absence of a national Human Rights Act, Australia’s legal and institutional protection of human rights is inadequate, particularly for individuals and communities that are marginalised or disadvantaged.”

Ms Wallam said this lack of protection was starkly illustrated by the Australian Government’s proposed Stronger Futures legislation for Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, “which directly and indirectly discriminates against our people.”

She said SNAICC considered it highly inappropriate that the draft human rights plan referred to the Stronger Futures legislation as a demonstration of consultation and as a sustainable long-term approach.

The national peak body for Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander children and families

“In its submission, SNAICC has again called for a strategy in the NT that responds to the *Little Children are Sacred Report* and that is in accordance with international human rights laws to which Australia is bound,” she said.

“A meaningful human rights plan would reflect these laws, as well as promote the empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to lead and drive measures to close the gap on disadvantage.

“The lack of genuine engagement is the very point made by the latest report on the NT intervention, from Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning at the University of Technology Sydney, and which led Malcolm Fraser to describe the process as ‘old fashioned white paternalism at its very worst’.”

In its submission on the draft plan, SNAICC has made 87 recommendations with practical measures that would provide better protection and promote the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and in particular a number of measures that address the protection and development our children.

SNAICC’s recommendations include:

- developing a national strategy as a matter of urgency for the full implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, consistent with recommendations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child;
- creating a National Children’s Commissioner, with a Deputy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Commissioner;
- developing a National Partnership Agreement in relation to progressing the Closing the Gap plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families in the context of the National Framework for the Protection of Australia’s Children 2009-2020; and
- ensuring the full engagement of Aboriginal of and Torres Strait Islander people in addressing the severe shortage of adequate housing, particularly in remote areas, as the foundation for improving the protection, wellbeing and development of our children.

To access SNAICC’s submission, visit: www.snaicc.asn.au/news-events

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