



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

MEDIA RELEASE

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We urgently need a national Deputy Children's Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

SNAICC has welcomed the Australian Government's decision to establish a National Children's Commissioner but has urged the Government to also create a national Deputy Children's Commissioner to address the serious issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

"We congratulate the Government on its announcement. This is a hugely positive step forward to protect and promote the human rights of children and young people in Australia, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children," SNAICC Chairperson Dawn Wallam said.

"SNAICC urges the Government to go one crucial step further and create a national deputy children's commissioner with a specific focus on our children and young people — the most vulnerable and disadvantaged Australians.

"Our children continue to experience systemic discrimination and disadvantage in health, education and housing. While considerable amounts of resources are being invested in responding to this disadvantage, such as Closing the Gap, attention is required to ensure these initiatives address the underlying causes and that they are tackled in a manner that achieves results.

"SNAICC asserts a national deputy commissioner is needed to oversee this important role — experiences with state children's commissioners highlights a need for a specific mandate for our children and young people.

"In the area of child protection, the deputy commissioner could well be the much-needed circuit-breaker to address the alarming overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection systems across Australia. It is a crisis that is threatening to become a calamity if urgent action is not taken.

"For example, in Queensland the rate of our children in the child protection system is 37 per cent. According to recent report, at the current rate of increase, by 2015 in two children in the Queensland child protection system will be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander."

Ms Wallam said a national deputy commissioner could also help advocate on and protect the unique rights and status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as First Peoples of Australia — including the right to enjoy their own culture.

SNAICC: The national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

She said that if it was not possible to create a separate deputy commissioner position, SNAICC would be keen to work with the Government to ensure the National Children's Commissioner had a clear mandate, specific functions and adequate resources to engage on the issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The SNAICC submission on the need for a Deputy Children's Commissioner is available at: www.snaicc.asn.au/policy-advocacy

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