



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

MEDIA RELEASE

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SNAICC welcomes final report into Queensland's child protection system — but with some concerns

SNAICC has welcomed most of the important recommendations in Commissioner Tim Carmody's final report on his inquiry into Queensland's child protection system, but has a number of concerns, including the report's failure to acknowledge the under-investment in Indigenous organisations and its position on adoptions.

SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams said SNAICC was pleased Commissioner Carmody's recommendations focused on prevention and early intervention measures, and promoted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and participation.

"Clearly the system has failed children in Queensland and an overhaul of the type Commissioner Carmody is recommending was needed," Ms Williams said.

"SNAICC applauds Commissioner Carmody's approach to reduce contact of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with the protection system by providing much more support to vulnerable families and parents under multiple levels of stress.

"As he points out, the current system is heavily skewed towards identifying children at risk and supporting them once they have been removed from their families. If this shift towards prevention is to be taken seriously, however, experience demonstrates that it will need to be embedded in legislation."

Ms Williams said SNAICC particularly welcomed the plan for developing the service capacity for integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family services over a 10-year period supported by the statewide Indigenous peak body.

"SNAICC is greatly encouraged by the Commission's view that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection services are a central component of the Queensland child protection system and should be better supported in their service delivery," Ms Williams said.

She said that it was encouraging that capacity building efforts would be informed by an assessment of current strengths and service gaps through the proposed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Service Reform project.

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

A major recommendation is to integrate current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection services — including Recognised Entities, family support, foster and kinship care, and family intervention services — within regional providers.

The Commission recommends that these integrated services should be affiliated with a well-functioning Aboriginal or mainstream organisation, presumably with the intention to create partnerships for building capacity for Aboriginal service delivery.

“This is also a positive move as long as genuine partnerships build the capacity and role of our communities and organisations to care for our children and families rather than redirecting further resources to mainstream agencies,” Ms Williams said.

However, Ms Williams said SNAICC believes further consideration is required on the potential implications of the proposed Child and Family Council — even with the prospect of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander co-chair — and a new Child Guardian position.

“There are concerns about their ability to provide a critical independent oversight role given that both authorities would be set up within government and their reports not subject to the scrutiny of Parliament,” Ms Williams said.

“The plan also abolishes the Commission for Children and Young People which — with its focus on evidence-based advocacy — has been one of the most effective child protection oversight bodies in the country.

“A number of critical roles currently undertaken by the children’s commission would be dispersed among a number of different bodies, many moved internally within government.”

Ms Williams said SNAICC was disappointed that the report does not adequately recognise the current strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and community-controlled organisations in Queensland to deliver services to vulnerable children and families.

“The roadmap needs to recognise that with significant reinvestment in community-controlled child and family services now, capacity growth can happen very quickly for communities that have strong leadership and organisations already in place,” she said.

“The Commissioner has not strongly recognised that one of the greatest challenges facing our organisations is under-investment in our community-controlled services compared with mainstream organisations.”

Ms Williams said SNAICC was concerned that Commissioner Carmody has recommended increased use of adoption as a permanency option without properly considering the impacts that this could have on vital connections to family, community and culture for our children.

“There must be further engagement with our communities and organisations to explore options for stability and permanency that maintain cultural and family connections for our children in out-of-home care,” she said.

SNAICC was also concerned that the Commissioner, in looking at relevant experiences overseas, had over-simplified the situation in Canada, by linking increases in over-representation of First Peoples children in the Canadian protection system with the decision to delegate powers to First Peoples agencies.

Commissioner Carmody made the link without considering the limited nature of delegations in Canada or recognising the complex causes of over-representation.

“This oversight must not take away from the vital goal to empower and transfer authority to our communities in line with current capacity and growth over time. It is essential that reforms in Queensland give our communities the opportunity to make decisions for the care and protection of their own children.”

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