

MEDIA RELEASE

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Our Children Deserve Power Behind Their Advocates

At the nation's largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Conference, SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children has called on governments to back words with action by legislating the National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and establishing dedicated, independent Commissioners in every state and territory.

The call comes close to one year since the establishment of the National Commission, a milestone won after decades of tireless advocacy by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations.

Catherine Liddle, CEO of SNAICC – National Voice for our Children said Sue-Anne Hunter has stepped into the National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young people role as a fearless voice for our children.

“But right now, what we need is legislation that gives the National Commissioner role teeth,” Ms Liddle said.

SNAICC is calling on the government to enact legislation that gives the National Commissioner the power to compel evidence, investigate systemic failures, and make binding recommendations, as it was always intended to have.

“That’s how we see real and long-lasting change,” Ms Liddle said.

“For far too long, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have paid the price for inaction, overrepresented in child protection and youth justice systems and underrepresented in decisions about their own futures.

“Our children deserve a Commissioner who can act independently, fearlessly, and with the authority of the law behind her. Someone who is truly empowered to drive the structural change urgently needed.

The conference held in Meanjin/ Brisbane, has also shone a light on jurisdictional Commissioners, including Queensland’s failure to act on adequately empowering the existing Family and Children’s Commissioner.

“Alongside many jurisdictions, in Queensland, the Commissioner for Children and Families has no legislative mandate or independent powers.

“This is not good enough not when Queensland continues to see Aboriginal children removed from their families and communities at some of the highest rates in the country.

“Without legislated powers, the Queensland Commissioner can’t challenge that, fix it or hold the system to account.”

Ms Liddle said that the current situation stands in stark contrast to states like South Australia where the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Commissioner is fully legislated, independent, and empowered to drive change.

“When a role is legislated, it means there’s a duty on government to resource it properly, to listen to it, and to take it seriously,” she said

“Having a legislated National Commissioner would set the tone for states and territories, lifting expectations and encouraging consistency across jurisdictions.”

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