

MEDIA RELEASE

18 May 2026

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LEADERSHIP CALLS FOR REAL ACTION ON CHILD SAFETY

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection experts from around the country have called on the NT Government to abandon plans to water down legislation that exists to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Diminishing existing legislative safeguards will not improve the safety or wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the NT.

Amendments currently before the NT Legislative Assembly propose to remove key aspects of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle. The Principle has been established across Australia for decades to ensure the importance of children's connections to family, community and culture are recognised and promoted in child protection decisions.

Professor Paul Gray, Leadership Group representative, said the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle is a framework that details how child protection authorities and associated services can best work to ensure safety for Aboriginal children and young people.

“The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principle emphasises what families, communities and child protection practitioners all know instinctively; that the immediate safety and long-term wellbeing of children is best promoted when we work together with those closest to them – their families and communities – to understand their circumstances and respond accordingly,” Professor Gray said.

On behalf of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group, Professor Gray rejected claims that the Child Placement Principle violates the safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

“There is no aspect of the Child Placement Principle that accepts unsafe circumstances for any child, or prevents child protection authorities from taking action to ensure children are safe,” Professor Gray said.

Countless system reviews, inquiries and reports over decades and across jurisdictions have emphasised the full implementation of the Child Placement Principle as a critical setting to ensure children are safe and promote their best interests. These reviews have found time and time again that the Principle is too often ignored and not implemented in practice.

“The Northern Territory has consistently had some of the highest rates of Aboriginal child removals in the country and some of the lowest rates of compliance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle,” Professor Gray said.

“This data suggests that that the NT is already ignoring the Child Placement Principle and failing to adequately keep our children safe. This is exactly why the Child Placement Principle is needed, with strengthened processes to improve compliance and accountability.”

SNAICC’s Family Matters report has consistently called for national standards to ensure family support and child protection legislation, policy, and practices comply with all elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.

The Leadership Group expressed support for the NT Children’s Commissioner’s call to halt these rushed changes and work with communities in the NT to realise a child protection system that is fit for purpose.

“We are united in our support for the calls of the NT Children’s Commissioner and the National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People to halt any proposed legislative changes and implement a Board of Inquiry that is Aboriginal-informed and led.

“The changes that need to be made to keep our children safe are too important to be progressed without our expertise and oversight.

“Those days should be long past. We stand ready to work in partnership to ensure all children live and thrive in safe homes and communities.”

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group is a key decision-making body established to work with all Australian governments on *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2021-2031*.

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