

# Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT)

An alliance of the CLC, NLC & AMSANT

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Disgust at decision on new Darwin youth detention facility site**

14 August 2019

APO NT today expressed anger and disgust at the Northern Territory Government's decision to ignore Royal Commission recommendations in announcing a new youth detention facility site beside the Darwin adult prison.\*\*

"Yesterday's announcement represents a further retreat on the NT Government's commitment to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the protection and detention of children in the NT", APO NT spokesperson, John Paterson said.

"It's becoming clear that the government isn't interested in genuine reform and certainly isn't interested in consulting or engaging with us.

"The message this decision sends to youth detainees is chillingly clear – you can look forward to a future path into the adult prison system.

"Forget the focus on prevention and breaking the cycles, and on a therapeutic, public health approach that the Royal Commission recommended.

APO NT also expressed frustration that the government has not taken the opportunity to repurpose the Don Dale site for the new centre.

"We advocated that the current Don Dale site, which is centrally located to public transport, should be retained, redeveloped and renamed", Mr Paterson said.

"The new site, 30 kilometres from Darwin and without accessible public transport, will prevent families from visiting their children—again against the Royal Commission's findings.

"We also advocated for the development of a number of secure residential options in regional locations along with Darwin and Alice Springs, rather than two large facilities in Darwin and Alice. These should be located within the community and facilitate therapeutic and rehabilitative care of young people to support their reintegration into community.

"This decision also occurs against the backdrop of the establishment of a formal COAG Partnership Agreement and a Joint Council on Closing the Gap with a national Coalition of Indigenous Peak organisations, seeking fundamental change in the way governments work with our people.

"The government's action undermines that aspiration but is sadly emblematic of top-down, expedient government decision-making that is central to the failure of Closing the Gap policies.

"APO NT strongly urges the NT Government to pause and reconsider its decision.

"Work with us to ensure our young people can transform their lives", Mr Paterson concluded.

[\*\*This coincides with the passing of a motion condemning the action by attendees at the National Indigenous Legal Conference and Indigenous Health Justice Conference in Darwin. See attached]

**Media inquiries: David Cooper 0418 486 310**

**Motion to the National Indigenous Legal Conference and the Indigenous Health Justice Conference participants, 14th August 2019**

Moved: Barbara Shaw

Seconded: Eddie Cubillo

That the attendees of the National Indigenous Legal Conference and Indigenous Health Justice Conference

condemn the decision of the NT Government and Minister Wakefield to construct the new youth detention facility beside the current Darwin adult prison, and the Conference attendees further note that this decision undermines key findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of children in the Northern Territory, and specifically is contrary to this statement:

*“The Commission believes that purpose built new residential accommodation facilities should be constructed in Darwin and Alice Springs.... The new facilities should not be located on, or in close proximity to, adult prison precincts.”*

(Royal Commission’s Final Report (2017), Volume 2B, Chapter 28, “A new model for youth justice”, p. 446).

and

further call upon the Federal Government to fully resource and fund the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory 2017, as it has done with the recommendations of other recent Royal Commissions.

Agreed unanimously.