

media release

NEW SOUTH WALES ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL

20 years on, but little progress

April 11, 2011

The New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC) has expressed its concern that 20 years after the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991, the majority of its recommendations have not been implemented.

Today marks twenty years since the release of the report to Parliament with its 339 recommendations. But two decades on, there's little progress.

Chairwoman Bev Manton said today the anniversary presented an opportunity to draw attention to the alarmingly high rate of Aboriginal incarceration.

"Aboriginal people are 14 times more likely to be incarcerated and represent nearly 30 percent of our prison population, despite representing less than 3 per cent of our total population.

"That's simply not acceptable.

"As a nation we must re-focus on this important issue. Specifically, the high rates of Aboriginal deaths in custody," she said.

"It's a harrowing statistic that 269 Aboriginal deaths in custody have occurred since the report was released back in 1991."

Ms Manton urged the federal government to re-visit the recommendations of the Royal Commission.

"As a bare minimum the Gillard Government needs to take a renewed approach to the recommendations as a matter of urgency.

"After two decades, it's painfully clear that the approach currently in place is broken.

"The answers don't lie in mandatory sentencing, or in increased jail sentences," she said.

"Research from abroad, particularly from the US, tells us of great success in the areas of diversion, preventative measures, rehabilitation and education programs as well as culturally appropriate counselling for our people.

“These solutions, along with others, need to be considered and reviewed.

“Our criminal justice system is at a crossroads, and after twenty years of abject failure, a fresh approach is not only needed, it’s long overdue.”

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