



National response to Indigenous youth crime rates *Roundtable in Sydney 28 January 2011*

The Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs is conducting a roundtable with representatives from around the nation before finalising its report into the high level of involvement of Indigenous juveniles and young adults in the criminal justice system.

The inquiry is focussing on prevention and early intervention in order to identify strategies to reduce the alarming detention and incarceration rates for Indigenous Australians. The detention rate for Indigenous juveniles is currently 28 times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous juveniles.

The roundtable will bring together a range of participants including Magistrates, State Police representatives, NGOs, academics and social researchers, drug and alcohol counsellors, justice organisations and others working in diversion and intervention fields.

Morning discussions will focus on the justice system and how it could better meet the needs of Indigenous youth in terms of initial contact, sentencing alternatives and post release assistance. In the afternoon, discussions will consider how to break the cycle of contact with the criminal justice system through changing social norms and building healthy, safe communities

The Committee Chair, Mr Shayne Neumann commented that 'It is a tragic state of affairs that Indigenous juveniles and young adults are more likely to be incarcerated today than at any other time since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody released its seminal report in 1991. This is a shameful state of affairs.'

He added 'The problems are complex and long standing, but we must harness the knowledge and commitment of those working in the field to bring about real change and opportunities for the future. This Committee is committed to finding solutions to reverse the trend of increasing numbers of Indigenous juveniles and young adults becoming trapped in the criminal justice system'.

The inquiry has received over 100 submissions and has conducted 17 public hearings and forums around Australia in metropolitan, regional and remote communities ranging from Darwin to Dubbo, Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Brisbane, Cairns, Adelaide, Perth and Fitzroy Crossing. This is the final hearing of the inquiry and the Committee expects to complete its report by the end of March.

The program and list of participants are available on the website at <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/atsia/sentencing/hearings/Program18.pdf>

For media comment, please contact:

Committee Chair Mr Shayne Neumann MP on (07) 3201 5300

For background information, contact the Committee Secretariat on (02) 62774559 or atsia.reps@aph.gov.au

**ROUNDTABLE PROGRAM
INDIGENOUS YOUTH AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM**

**National Centre of Indigenous Excellence
180 George Street, Redfern, Sydney
FRIDAY, 28 JANUARY 2011
9.00am to 4.00pm**

9.00am to 12.00pm Session 1 - Effectiveness and challenges of the justice system for Indigenous youth

Issues to be discussed include:

- Relationships between police and Indigenous youth and their families
- Diversion from the court process – access for Indigenous youth
- Legal services for Indigenous youth
- Interpreting and hearing impairment services
- Coordination of services to ensure rehabilitation, appropriate health care, adequate accommodation and return to school or work, both on entry to justice system and after release
- Court and sentencing alternatives
- Involvement of community justice groups
- Female indigenous youth and the criminal justice system
- Reducing offending and recidivism
- Indigenous policy consultation

12.00pm - 1.00pm *Lunch*

1.00pm to 4.00pm Session 2 - Breaking the cycle of contact with the criminal justice system through social norms and healthy, safe communities

Issues to be discussed include:

- Detection and appropriate intervention on health issues including mental health and social wellbeing, hearing loss, FASD, and alcohol and drug use
- Indigenous consultation
- Involvement of grass roots services
- Family and community initiatives
- Sustained funding to justice diversion and rehabilitation programs
- Accommodation options for Indigenous youth at risk and post release
- Breaking the cycle of offending and recidivism
- Increasing education retention
- Access to employment opportunities
- Justice reinvestment

4.00pm *Adjournment*