



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**COMMITTEES**

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait  
Islander Affairs Committee**

**Report**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 20 June 2011**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 20 June 2011  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Mr NEUMANN

**Source** House  
**Proof** Yes  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

(Blair) (NaN.NaN pm)

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (20:11): On behalf of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, I present the committee's report entitled *Doing time - time for doing: Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system*, together with the minutes of proceedings and evidence received by the committee.

The Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs has completed its inquiry into the high levels of involvement of Indigenous juveniles and young adults in the criminal justice system. It is a national shame; it is a national tragedy. It has been 20 years since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody report, yet the incarceration rate of Indigenous Australians, including Indigenous youth, is now worse. The committee believes this is a shameful state of affairs and that, as the title of this report, *Doing time - time for doing*, suggests, it really is the time to act.

Available statistics on Indigenous young people in contact with the criminal justice systems are alarming. Fifty-nine per cent of the total detention population is Indigenous. There are 28 times as many Indigenous juveniles as non-Indigenous juveniles in detention in Australia. The prisoner census data for 2000 to 2010 shows a 55 per cent increase in men in incarceration and a 47 per cent increase in women. Young Indigenous adults aged 17 to 24 are 15 times as likely as young non-Indigenous adults to be imprisoned. The rates of imprisonment of Indigenous women in Australia is rising at an alarming rate. In 2006-07, Indigenous women were 35 times as likely to be hospitalised as a result of partner abuse. Between 2000 and 2009, there was a 66 per cent rise in imprisonment of Indigenous Australians. By the age of 25 years, 40 per cent of Indigenous men have been charged formally by the police with an offence.

The committee was made aware of these worrying statistics throughout the inquiry and consulted with a wide range of stakeholders to investigate how the federal government could assist in reversing the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice systems around the country. The scope of the inquiry was vast given the complexities of the issues that contributed to the high levels of

involvement by Indigenous youth in criminal justice systems. There were many roundtables and public hearings—18 public hearings across Australia, and we visited three detention centres. There were 110 submissions from a wide range of individuals and groups. One of the major criticisms was the need for better coordination of service delivery: silos, departments not talking to departments, organisations not communicating with each other and individuals not sharing relevant information.

This is a comprehensive report, with 40 recommendations. These include two high-level recommendations that seek to address the void in the COAG Closing the Gap strategy by recommending the setting of justice targets, including a national partnership agreement under the Safe Communities building block. Indigenous engagement in and delivery of local services are highlighted as the most effective ways of creating positive outcomes for Indigenous people. The main thrust of the report is that prevention and early intervention are of utmost importance. The committee makes recommendations about developing positive social norms, improving parenting skills, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, increasing engagement in education, initiatives to assist the transition into employment and increasing participation in sport and in cultural and recreational activities. The value of Indigenous mentors was also highlighted in relation to these matters. There are a number of recommendations to improve teacher education and police awareness of issues. Language barriers and hearing impairments were also highlighted.

As the title of the report, *Doing time*, suggests, too many young Indigenous people are doing time in juvenile detention centres and prisons. It is now time for doing. It is time we were doing more to prevent this national tragedy, this national disgrace. The problems are complex and longstanding. We must harness the knowledge and commitment of those working in the field to bring about real change and opportunity for the future of all Indigenous Australians.

I want to close by thanking the previous chair of the committee, the Hon. Bob Debus MP, and his committee; also Anna Dacre, the secretary of the committee; Susan Cardell and Rebecca Gordon, the inquiry secretaries; and research officers John White, Ben Mudaliar and Natalya Wells. I want to thank all

those involved in the committee. I want to thank the coalition for their bipartisan approach, particularly the member for Murray, and for their great cooperation, along with that of the Labor members of the committee. I commend the report to the parliament.