The Labor Party is encouraged by reports today that the Prime Minister might finally overturn his government’s ridiculous opposition to implementing justice targets under the Closing the Gap framework.

Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion has long ignored the calls for justice targets, despite repeated urgings from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and expert bodies.

If Malcolm Turnbull is ready to accept that his Minister is wrong, and to adopt Labor’s policy, that is excellent news.
National justice targets will allow us to focus on community safety, particularly the protection of women and children, preventing crime and reducing incarceration rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

The targets should be developed in cooperation with state and territory governments, law enforcement agencies, legal and community services, and guided by community leaders, Elders and Aboriginal representative organisations.

There has to be as much focus on the factors that can help prevent the high levels of incarceration, as well as what happens to individuals once in the criminal justice and corrective services system.

A young Indigenous man today is more likely to go to jail than university, and an Indigenous adult is 15 times more likely to be imprisoned than a non-Indigenous adult.

These appalling numbers demand action, including the reversal of the Government’s cuts to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, further examination of non-custodial options and alternatives to mandatory detention, as well as a focus on justice reinvestment.

We call on the Prime Minister to urgently confirm this report, and work with Labor to make justice targets a reality.

The Turnbull Government can’t keep ignoring the Indigenous incarceration crisis. It must start showing national leadership and confront this challenge.

Business as usual will not work. If we continue with the same approach, we’ll get the same results.

SATURDAY, 25 MARCH 2017

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