

# MEDIA RELEASE

8 November 2018

## AMSANT calls for urgent response to Don Dale incident

AMSANT today called for urgent change to the Northern Territory Government's approach to youth justice reform following another serious incident at the Don Dale Detention Centre.

"AMSANT is extremely concerned about the welfare of the children and staff currently held or working in the detention facilities", said AMSANT CEO, John Paterson.

"The fact that police were called and tear gas was used and that the children are now languishing in the Darwin Watch House indicates that what is currently being done at Don Dale is not working.

"We are calling for better and more effective engagement with Aboriginal leadership in dealing with this crisis", Mr Paterson said.

"AMSANT's offer to partner in brokering solutions still stands and we urge Territory Families to engage with us and other Aboriginal leaders more closely.

"At present there are serious questions over whether the Northern Territory Government has in place the capacity to manage the change processes required for these reforms.

"There remain significant issues around the training and numbers of staff, and an ongoing situation of children being subject to long periods of lock-down.

"It's a pressure cooker situation that will keep resulting in serious incidents such as occurred yesterday.

"Of the children in detention at least half are in the child protection system and many are on remand.

"We call for urgent action for the release of young people held on remand (not yet sentenced) with non-serious offences to be returned to community and families as a matter of priority.

"Moving to a youth development approach within these facilities, as recommended by the Royal Commission, is not being approached with the urgency required.

"More should be occurring by this stage down the track, such as the establishment of an elders visiting and mentoring program, which is an obvious gap at present.

"With new facilities not due to open till 2021, this is too long to wait for the changes needed.

"AMSANT is also concerned that the government has decided to plan for only two, expensive, urban based facilities in Darwin and Alice Springs. We have advocated for smaller, regionally-based facilities that will enable the engagement of families in the development of their children.

"We need the government to work in partnership with us.

"Ultimately, a stronger focus on Aboriginal-led programs that support children and their families in communities so they don't end up in detention in the first place, is where we need to be", Mr Paterson concluded.

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