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Press Release

The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre has called for greater Aboriginal involvement in deciding the terms of reference for the agreed national Royal Commission into Juvenile Detention in the Northern Territory.

Chief Executive of the TAC, Heather Sculthorpe, responded to the swift political decision to establish the Royal Commission by calling on the government to expand the enquiry to the youth detention facilities of other States and Territories and to examining the role of all State and Territory authorities when they assume the place of parents to Aboriginal youth.

Ms Sculthorpe said, “The cover-up of wrong doing had started by lunch time today when the Northern Territory Chief Minister Adam Giles held a press conference where he included statements about the unacceptable rate of juvenile offending in the Northern Territory, and the role of Aboriginal parents in causing their children to be damaged offenders at a young age. Such statements are side-tracking the issue of the very grave failures of State and Territory juvenile detention facilities to serve their role as correctional facilities rather than torture chambers like those designed for international terrorists.

“In Tasmania before Attorney General George Brandis defunded our legal service and gave the funds to Victoria, we had a very active presence at youth detention facilities and operated youth programs and alternative to detention programs which kept most Aboriginal youth out of State detention. We established those programs because the State was failing our young people. This new Royal Commission must be extended to include the treatment of Aboriginal youth in Tasmanian detention. It is totally erroneous to imagine that such abuses happen only in northern Australia,”

Ms Sculthorpe said the defunding of Aboriginal youth programs in Tasmania also needs external scrutiny, “The Hodgman government has shut off funds for our alternative to detention program but is now spending more to send young Aborigines to programs in the Northern Territory, so far removed from their own families and in disregard of the need of young people to form close connections with their own community and culture. The Tasmanian government has effectively blocked us out from participation in planning for better futures of these young Aborigines. A Royal Commission would highlight this failure and make recommendations for a better future”.

“The Federal Government must ensure truly independent examination of the role of the States and Territories in their treatment of young Aborigines and this must exclude any decision making role for those whose failings are under scrutiny. No State or Territory involvement or else there will be no impartial examination of the horrendous accounts which have, and are still, emerging.”