

*Released 22 September 2023*  
**Meeting Communiqué - 4 September 2023**

On 4 September 2023, the Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners, Advocates and Guardians (ANZCCAG) met in Darwin on Larrakia Country. Larrakia Man, Trent Lee provided a Welcome to Country and led ANZCCAG members through a saltwater cleansing. We pay great respect to Trent for this gracious and memorable welcome.

Over the course of the day, members shared their jurisdictional activities advocating for children and young people, including progress against their agreed collective advocacy priorities for 2023.

We welcomed the New Zealand (Aotearoa) Commissioner, Judge Frances Eivers, who provided an update about the Mana Mokopuna framework and their newly finalised key priorities: **education**, **mental wellbeing**, ending **family violence** and **monitoring children in detention**.

The following were the focus of discussion for this meeting:

***Youth justice and detention***

The ANZCCAG expressed serious concern about the actions of the Queensland government in suspending the *Human Rights Act 2019* (Qld) to retrospectively legalise the indefinite detention of children and young people in adult facilities, including police watchhouses. The ANZCCAG called for an urgent end to the detention of children in adult facilities, which breaches international human rights obligations and exposes children as young as 10 years old to serious and foreseeable risks of physical, emotional and psychological harm.

Members also highlighted ongoing government failures to properly account for core determinants of children and young people's wellbeing in youth detention, especially through the imposition of solitary confinement and other isolation practices.

In response to the ongoing crisis facing youth justice systems, the ***ANZCCAG (Australian members) calls on governments to immediately release the report of the United Nations Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture arising from the terminated 2022 Australian Inspection, which was provided to all Australian governments in mid-2023.***

***Voice Referendum***

The ANZCCAG affirmed the importance of placing the rights, safety and wellbeing of children and young people at the centre of our thinking during the lead-up to the Voice Referendum on 14 October 2023.

***The ANZCCAG call on the collective Australian community to engage in respectful discussions, to uphold our joint responsibility to protect the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.***

The ANZCCAG highlighted the importance of communicating to children and young people that they have the right to be free from harassment and to express their views and encouraging them to seek support when things are tough.

### ***Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioners***

The ANZCCAG noted the just-released report of the Yoorrook Justice Commission into Victoria's Child Protection and Criminal Justice Systems, which included recommendations to:

- establish a self-determined child protection system for First Nations children and young people, and
- legislate a dedicated Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People.

*The Australian ANZCCAG members reaffirmed their support for independent, legislated Commissioners for Aboriginal Children and Young People in each jurisdiction, including at the Commonwealth level.*

### ***Child safe standards and reportable conduct schemes***

The ANZCCAG expressed concern at slow progress in some jurisdictions to implement outstanding recommendations from the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Childhood Sexual Abuse*, regarding implementing Child Safe Standards and a Reportable Conduct Scheme in each jurisdiction.

*The Australian members call on all levels of government to implement these recommendations as a matter of priority.*

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**Further information** about matters raised in this communique can be sought from the ANZCCAG co-Chairs: Shona Reid, SA Guardian for Children and Young People ([gryp@sa.gov.au](mailto:gryp@sa.gov.au)) and Luke Twyford, Principal Commissioner, Qld Child and Family Commission ([info@qfcc.qld.gov.au](mailto:info@qfcc.qld.gov.au))

### ***Communique signatories – 4 September 2023\****

- **Judge Frances Eivers**, Children's Commissioner (New Zealand/Aotearoa)
- **Jodie Griffiths-Cook**, Public Advocate and Children and Young People Commissioner (ACT)
- **Barbara Causon**, Aboriginal Children's Advocate (ACT)
- **Anne Hollonds**, National Children's Commissioner (Cth)
- **Zoë Robinson**, Advocate for Children and Young People (NSW)
- **Shannon Thorne**, Aboriginal Advocate for Children and Young People (NSW)
- **Nicole Hucks**, Children's Commissioner (NT)
- **Luke Twyford**, Commissioner (Qld)
- **Natalie Lewis**, Commissioner (Qld)
- **Shayna Smith**, Public Guardian (Qld)
- **April Lawrie**, Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People (SA)
- **Helen Connolly**, Commissioner for Children and Young People (SA)
- **Liana Buchanan**, Principal Commissioner for Children and Young People (Vic)
- **Jacqueline McGowan-Jones**, Commissioner for Children and Young People (WA)
- **Shona Reid**, Guardian for Children and Young People / Training Centre Visitor (SA)

\*NOTE: Specific ANZCCAG Communiques are endorsed by individual members as indicated.