EMBARGOED 3pm, Thursday, 31 January 2013

RESPONSE TO NSW OMBUDSMAN’S REPORT

The NSW Government has welcomed the recommendations in a NSW Ombudsman’s report tabled in Parliament today on the previous Government’s Interagency plan to tackle child sexual assault in Aboriginal communities.

The report includes 93 recommendations across government, including Health, Attorney Generals, Education, Police, Family and Community Services and Department of Premier and Cabinet. The Interagency Plan was created in response to recommendations made by the Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce in July 2006.

“The comprehensive report acknowledges the failures of the past including poorly integrated services, chronic staffing shortages and poor accountability,” Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Victor Dominello said.

“While child sexual assault in Aboriginal communities is clearly a highly complex matter and there are no quick-fix solutions, we must acknowledge that previous attempts at preventing it have failed.

“The NSW Government recognises that not only does this require a whole-of-government approach, it requires a commitment to doing things differently.

“In partnership with Aboriginal leaders and communities, we will continue to work closely with the Ombudsman to ensure a long term, holistic approach is taken,” Mr Dominello said.

Mr Dominello noted that the Ombudsman identifies that one of the key factors for children at risk is poor school attendance.

“The NSW Government launched Connected Communities in May 2012 to improve school attendance and performance of Aboriginal students in remote and regional communities. The Ombudsman said the NSW Government’s Connected Communities initiative ‘recognises the critical role that schools and health services play in providing vulnerable children and their families with the support they need’.

The Ombudsman also states that more funding and more programs will not provide a solution and that establishing strong governance and accountability arrangements is where the focus should be.

The Ombudsman’s report supports the current NSW Government’s Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs, and its commitment to strengthening accountability across government and forming genuine partnerships with Aboriginal leaders. The Ombudsman said that this ‘provides considerable scope to achieve real and lasting change’.
“The NSW Government will shortly release the strategy for Aboriginal Affairs, which will include a significant focus on strengthening government accountability and building Aboriginal communities’ decision making capacity, which will assist in communities’ ability to tackle child sexual assault,” Mr Dominello said.

“The Strategy will also outline concrete initiatives’ around language and culture, linking education and employment and economic development.”

Mr Dominello acknowledged the work of the Ministerial Advisory Panel, including by the Chair Bev Manton, and their commitment to getting better outcomes for Aboriginal children.

The NSW Government will consider this significant report and release a fully considered response in the coming months.

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