



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Bishops Commission for Relations with Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders

Bishop Christopher Saunders (Chairman)
Bishop Joseph Oudeman OFM Cap
Bishop Christopher Prowse
Bishop Donald Sproxtton

MEDIA STATEMENT

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What Choice?

Aboriginal peoples have the right to decent services where they live

Chairman of the Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Bishop Christopher Saunders, has posed the question 'what choice?' to Prime Minister Tony Abbott after his comment that Aboriginal peoples are living in remote communities as a 'lifestyle choice'.

"Where is the lifestyle choice?" Bishop Saunders asked. "Communities are under serviced and patently there is insufficient listening to the voices of people in Aboriginal communities. We are forcing Aboriginal people out of their ancestral lands to live in regional towns. The reality is that when a community is closed down people and their families have nowhere to go, so they end up on the streets, separated from their land, heritage, family, culture and spirituality.

"It is a basic human right to choose where you live but it seems that our government is giving people in Aboriginal communities the 'choice' to live in a community with only limited resources and services.

"After 200 years of colonisation and dispossession, surely out of fairness we owe something to Australia's First Nations in the way of respect and recompense. Recent research has found that where Aboriginal communities are supported to serve as models of landscape management or as the source of new community initiatives, they have far better outcomes in health and education. Like other Australians, they have the right to access basic municipal services."

Today the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC) said, 'The Prime Minister's use of the term "lifestyle choices" is an insult to Aboriginal people. To dispossess another generation of our people will deal a further blow to health, education and living standard disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Additionally, the burden on other communities will increase as people are forced to move.'

For media queries, please contact Aoife Connors on 0450 348 597 | media@catholic.org.au