

Media Statement



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AUSTRALIA NEEDS A GENUINE DEBATE ON RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

The National Native Title Council (NNTC) today called for the Prime Minister to show some leadership and continue to resist proposals from either his backbench or the crossbenches to make changes to Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA).

NNTC's Chief Executive Officer, Glen Kelly said that the Australian community should engage in a genuine debate on what Section 18C actually meant. "To suggest that someone could be 'thrown in jail' for making a racist comment is not true; to suggest that 18C impedes free speech is also not true; and to suggest that offence is always taken and not given is utter nonsense.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples live with racism on a daily basis and this is one of the underlying sources of tension preventing the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities from reconciling.

"Proponents for making changes argue that the RDA inhibits the capacity of people to engage in robust discussion and this is nonsense," said Mr Kelly. "The community can and does engage in frank and open discussion about racial discrimination however, our minority communities need to be protected from experiencing real racial vilification.

"Australians are, generally speaking, very tolerant and respectful people, however there are some in our society that believe it is OK to vilify someone on the basis of their race or culture and this is what needs to be stamped out.

"Rather than focusing on watering down the RDA, our MPs should be engaged in finding solutions for the appalling rates of suicide amongst our young people and the level of domestic violence in our homes, not only Indigenous homes but across our communities," said Mr Kelly. "These are the initiatives that will help dispell stereotypical attitudes towards Indigenous peoples and significantly reduce the level of racial intolerance in our society.

"The legislation should stay as it is. To proceed with the proposed changes would be a significant step backwards in fostering good relationships amongst all Australians regardless of their background."

The NNTC is the peak body for the Indigenous native title sector.

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