

Submission
No 82

**INQUIRY INTO HIGH LEVEL OF FIRST NATIONS
PEOPLE IN CUSTODY AND OVERSIGHT AND REVIEW OF
DEATHS IN CUSTODY**

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I wish to make a submission into the Inquiry into the high level of First Nations people in custody and oversight and review of deaths in custody. I was Principal of Macintyre High School, Inverell and Duval High School, Armidale for fifteen years. Both of these schools are situated in New England region of NSW, and both of these schools have significant Aboriginal enrolments. Consequently I have had considerable experience and contacts with Aboriginal families and young people. I have been aware for a number of years of what appears to be the racial profiling of young Aboriginals; and the overpolicing of Aboriginal communities and of young Aboriginal people in particular. I am also aware of the large number of young Aboriginal people who are targeted by the police when they are gathering in parks, malls and at the cinema. I have had experience of occasions when these young people face serious penalties for which their non-Aboriginal peers would receive a warning. This contributes to the overrepresentation of indigenous young people in incarceration.

Further I am horrified that the minimum age for imprisonment is 10 years of age and that a recent meeting of attorneys-general rejected calls to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 years to 14 years of age. This together with mandatory sentencing has led to numbers Aboriginal children being imprisoned and damaged irreparably by the justice system.

It is also deeply disturbing that, since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991, there have been, nationally, 435 deaths of Aboriginal people in custody; and that no one has ever been held responsible for these deaths. Further, no government has fully implemented the recommendations of the Royal Commission.

Alice Cairns