

**Submission
No 94**

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

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I write to you today regarding the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders in custody in NSW.

My memoir, Snakes and Ladders, critiquing the NSW correctional system was published in February this year.

Of my book, The Age said: 'Tough, courageous, and moving, it's about empowerment as much as powerlessness and, ultimately, the nature of power.'

The Age

Snakes and Ladders details my two trips to women's prisons in NSW, 13 years apart. I also earned my doctorate conducting a narrative and cultural analysis of the power dynamics inherent in this system.

The one regret I have about my book is that I didn't talk much about race. As a white woman, I didn't feel that were my stories were tell but far too many of the people in my story were Aboriginal.

In 2010 I saw women punished in prison for things that we acknowledge as vital cultural practices outside those walls. One woman was locked in isolation for weeks after putting paint hand prints on a wall. We heard the officers screaming at her to shut up at all hours.

The flip side of this is the factors outside those walls that act to funnel our traditional owners through the gates.

Outside of prison I've worked with and around Aboriginal and Torres Straight communities in both academic and community services. One consistent feature of these experiences has been regular drive bys, check-ins and visits from police. With a constant police presence it's not hard for almost any public gathering to involve something the NSW police find worth investigation.

If the cops drove by any typical white Australian's house 10-15 times a day, those kids might be caught doing just as many crimes. And when people are being stopped and searched regularly, eventually they respond aggressively.

Over policing in NSW is out of control. High visibility and zero tolerance policing has created an atmosphere of great. Citizens are either scared to risk engaging with police or so angry that they cannot help appearing aggressive.

We need to stop the increases in police spending and start putting back into communities.