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NEW SOUTH WALES ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL

February 5, 2010

Promises Need to Be Delivered

Aboriginal people and the wider community should not be fooled by claims by the Federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs Jenny Macklin that her government is placing local Indigenous leaders at the front and centre of efforts to close the opportunity and life expectancy gaps between Aboriginal people and their fellow Australians.

NSWALC Chairperson Bev Manton says Minister Macklin appears to have replaced her promise to implement evidence based policies with media spin.

Ms Manton was commenting on a media statement issued by Minister Macklin this week which claimed the Rudd Government has begun an intensive effort to promote Indigenous leadership as part of its commitment to “forge a new relationship, based on mutual trust and respect, with Indigenous Australians.”

Minister Macklin highlighted a meeting she attended earlier in the week which included 37 Indigenous engagement officers, many of them employed under the federal government’s intervention in the Northern Territory.

Ms Manton says NSWALC will work with any government which seeks to promote genuine Indigenous leadership, but those leaders should be chosen by the Aboriginal community.

“There needs to be a genuine partnership forged between the Federal Government and Aboriginal leaders, elected and appointed by the community.

“So far we have not seen much evidence of this in NSW. Efforts to forge true partnerships have been piecemeal.

“It’s encouraging that Aboriginal people are working in the Australian Public Service to help Close the Gap between black and white Australians,” she added.

“But in making statements like this, the Minister runs the risk of being accused of promoting token leadership for Aboriginal people.

“For appointed leadership to be effective, it needs to operate at a high level within government. If these people are not at the top of the public service, then how can you call that leadership?

“And if they’re not appointed or elected by Aboriginal people, you can’t call that community based leadership either.”

“I’m sure all of the officers identified by Minister Macklin work hard in the best interests of their communities. But I’m sure they would understand that leadership is earned not conferred.

“The questions must be asked, where are these Indigenous engagement officers employed, and at what level? Are they senior public servants, are they mid-level public servants? Who do these people answer to? Their communities or the government?

“I’d call on Minister Macklin to publicly divulge this information so that Aboriginal people can make up their own minds about the level of authority they would bestow on the Minister’s anointed leaders.”

Ms Manton added that NSWALC was disappointed that once again the Prime Minister had failed to keep his promise to deliver a report on progress towards closing the gap on the first day’s sittings of Federal Parliament.

“Nowhere in Minister Macklin’s release is there any mention of the fact that the Government blocked a motion from the Federal Opposition this week to ensure the Prime Minister keep his promise and delivered the report when he said he would..

“Mr. Rudd made a promise to deliver his report on the first sitting day of the Parliamentary year. This is the second time he has failed to meet his own promise.

“Aboriginal people in NSW, and elsewhere, want to hear what evidence-based policies this Government has implemented to Close the Gap in areas such as housing, health and education and the progress made.

“So far this year we have received silence and spin.

“It is simply not good enough.”

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