

SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT  
ISLANDER AFFAIRS  
INQUIRY INTO RACISM, HATE AND VIOLENCE DIRECTED AT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT  
ISLANDER PEOPLES

Submitted by:

Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) Queensland

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ABOUT ANTAR QUEENSLAND

ANTaR Queensland is an independent, community-based organisation operating in Queensland. We work alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to support justice, rights and respect, and to deepen understanding of our shared history. Our work includes advocacy, community outreach and public education that support reconciliation grounded in truth, responsibility and lived experience.

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of this land and recognise that sovereignty was never ceded. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

ANTaR Queensland's work is guided by a commitment to moral and legal recognition of the distinctive status and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This includes supporting self-determination, protecting relationships to land and Country, and standing against racism, violence and policies that continue to cause harm.

We do not speak for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Our role is to listen, to stand in solidarity, and to help create space for First Nations voices, leadership and truth to be heard and acted upon.

ANTaR Queensland is making this submission to strongly advocate for the Inquiry into racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We do so because these harms are not abstract or historical. They are present, ongoing and deeply felt in everyday life. At a time of heightened public debate, visible increases in racial abuse (including online), and continued over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in systems that cause harm, decisive national leadership is urgently needed.

This submission is informed by experiences shared with us by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Queensland, including racism within justice, health, education and government systems. While grounded in Queensland, these experiences reflect national patterns of systemic racism that require coordinated, whole-of-government responses.

Racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are not one-off incidents or the actions of a few individuals. They are woven into systems, institutions and public narratives, and require honest reckoning, accountability and sustained reform.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission calls for practical and sustained action to address racism, hate and violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

ANTaR Queensland urges the Committee to:

- Recognise racism as systemic, shaped by laws, policies and institutional practices rather than individual behaviour alone.
- Provide national leadership grounded in truth-telling, accountability and respect for human rights.
- Shift away from crisis-driven responses towards prevention and community-led solutions.
- Strengthen protections against racial vilification, hate speech and racially motivated violence, including online abuse.
- Consult with and listen to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to establish ways of ensuring justice, policing, health, education and child protection systems are culturally safe and accountable.
- Commit to long-term support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led organisations as primary agents of change.

The optimal outcome of this inquiry would be a coordinated national approach that meaningfully reduces racism and violence, rebuilds trust in institutions, and enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to live with safety, dignity and self-determination.

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## THE NATURE AND IMPACT OF RACISM, HATE AND VIOLENCE

### Systemic and Structural Racism

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, racism is not experienced only through individual acts of prejudice. It is embedded within laws, policies and institutional practices that shape everyday interactions with government, services and public life. These systems are grounded in Australia's colonial foundations and continue to operate in ways that marginalise or unnecessarily control First Nations peoples.

Racism manifests through institutional racism, interpersonal racism and internalised racism. These forms intersect with dispossession, intergenerational trauma and socio-economic inequality, reinforcing harm over time.

### Impacts on Individuals and Communities

The impacts of racism, hate and violence are cumulative and enduring. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience higher levels of surveillance and criminalisation, ongoing harm to social and emotional wellbeing, barriers to housing, education and employment, and withdrawal from public life due to fear and exhaustion.

Across Queensland, racism is experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a regular part of daily life, experienced in public spaces, workplaces, schools, hospitals and interactions with police and government agencies. Online environments have intensified these harms, allowing racial abuse to spread quickly and publicly.

Following the 2023 Voice to Parliament referendum, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported a noticeable increase in racist abuse and hostility. We have heard many accounts of abuse that distorts and constrains how people are able to take part in everyday life: of young people unable to work at a supermarket check-out because of the abuse they endured; an elder and her grandson being refused service at an RSL club after a lifetime of family engagement in the armed services; a respected female elder being verbally abused by strangers as she simply walked down the street. ANTaR Queensland has itself been subjected to significant bursts of online abuse, notably around 26 January.

Communities have described heightened fear, grief and exhaustion, with some people withdrawing from public and community life to protect themselves and their families. For many, this period reopened historical trauma and reinforced a sense that racism is tolerated or emboldened within public discourse and institutions.

#### Psychological, Cultural and Intergenerational Harm

Racism causes profound psychological, cultural and intergenerational harm to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These harms are ongoing and cumulative, shaping everyday experiences of safety, identity and belonging. Impacts include persistent hypervigilance, trauma responses and mental health impacts, disconnection from culture and identity, and the re-triggering of historical and intergenerational trauma.

The experience of abuse and of seeing those you respect and care for abused can also lead to marginalisation, anger and a rejection of the society that you experience as rejecting you.

In Queensland, these harms cannot be separated from the legacy of child removal policies. From at least 1910 until the early 1970s, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, including babies, were forcibly removed from their families because of their descent. In some cases, including cases of respected colleagues and friends, family members were killed during these removals. Children were placed into missions under prison-like conditions, denied language and culture, subjected to extreme control, trained for domestic and labour roles, and paid little or nothing when sent out to work. This is not ancient history; the Cherbourg Boys' Dormitory did not close until 1981.

The impacts of these policies include deep trauma reflected in high rates of mental and physical illness, incarceration, poverty and suicide. These outcomes are documented in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991) and the Bringing Them Home Report (1997). These harms continue today as trauma is carried across generations through families and communities.

Racism is not only deeply damaging intergenerationally for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it also creates serious problems for Australian society more generally. It reflects mis- and disinformation (whether online or through traditional means) about First Peoples and their experiences, and it embeds a lack of understanding of our own history as a nation and a country, in all its light and dark. Such misunderstanding is an obstacle to appreciating the richness, resilience and insight First Nations cultures and peoples bring to life in Australia, it

entrenches division and suspicion among people, it is a failure to embrace the complexity and richness of our shared history and shared existence and it undermines the development of an identity as Australians that is grounded in our history and sense of place. The capacity to appreciate diversity and nurture mutual respect and mutual regard is fundamental to our shared well-being. Racism towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples weakens us all, when we need to face the world strong in our collective selves.

Systemic racism also indicates that at least some (and perhaps many) of our fundamental institutions are affected by racism, quite independently of whether individuals within those institutions have racist attitudes. This is perhaps most clear in the rates of incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults, young people and children. (For example, see [summary](#) AIHW Report 2024.) The shocking rates of incarceration speak directly to a pressing need to rebalance the justice system so that it actually enables justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and creates safer communities for everyone. This topic is beyond this submission but there are efforts within jurisdictions around the country that could be reviewed, supported and built upon. Crime prevention through supporting communities to care holistically for children, manage minor crime and assist people released from prison are elements common to many of these efforts. Implementing the recommendations of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody would also be an important step. While the justice system is in many respects a state jurisdiction there is much the Commonwealth could do, if it was committed to undoing systemic racism.

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## KEY DRIVERS OF RACISM AND VIOLENCE

ANTaR Queensland identifies the following interconnected drivers:

- The absence of full and honest truth-telling about Australia's history and ongoing colonial harm.
- Deficit-based narratives that frame Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as problems rather than rights-holders.
- Political and media discourse that downplays or excuses racism.
- Lack of accountability for racist conduct within institutions.
- Exclusion of First Nations peoples from decisions that affect their lives.
- The failure to carefully assess systems and institutions (including Child Protection and Justice systems) in relation to patterns of entrenched harm to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to look at different ways of achieving the protection of children and justice shaped fundamentally by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

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## WHAT AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE LOOKS LIKE

Meaningful change requires national leadership developed in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This includes truth-telling processes, strengthened legal protections including respect for human rights, culturally safe justice and service systems, and sustained investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led organisations.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

ANTaR Queensland recommends that the Committee:

1. Recognise racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as systemic.
2. Implement the Human Rights Commission's Anti-Racism Framework and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People. These frameworks require full, genuine consultation and First Nations self-determination.
3. Strengthen protections against racial vilification and hate crimes.
4. Invest in truth-telling.
5. Invest in public education programs and public narrative change.
6. Reform policing and justice systems to reduce racist harm.
7. Commit to long-term funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations.
8. Establish independent oversight and accountability mechanisms.

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## CONCLUSION

This inquiry offers an opportunity to move beyond acknowledgement towards action. Ending racism, hate and violence requires honesty about the past, accountability in the present and commitment to a different future. ANTaR Queensland urges the Committee to listen deeply, act courageously and work alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to create lasting reform.

ANTaR Queensland remains committed to standing in solidarity and supporting this work.