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**Media Release**

**ABORIGINAL PEOPLE MUST BE HEARD BY ROYAL COMMISSION**

The Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia (ALSWA) is concerned that abuse against Aboriginal children could be under-reported to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The comments were made in a special edition of the Indigenous Law Bulletin (ILB) which looks at how the Royal Commission is engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

CEO of ALSWA, Mr Dennis Eggington, says that while the Commission has done important work so far, he is concerned the inquiry will only scratch the surface when looking at the issue for Aboriginal people in WA.

“The biggest hurdle for the Commission in WA is the legacy of ‘Redress WA’,” he says. “The scheme was flawed and many victims felt that any attempt to recognise their suffering was cheapened by the Government’s decision on compensation.”

‘Redress WA’ was a compensation scheme set up to provide redress—by way of ex gratia payment—to people who suffered abuse while they were children in care. The WA scheme commenced in May 2008 and concluded just over 12 months later on 30 June 2009.

“The scheme was beset by a number of problems,” says Mr Eggington. “One of the main issues was the strong sense of injustice over the change in compensation offered by the State Government; and the fact that the quantum offered was extremely low at \$80,000 to begin with, then later reduced to just \$45,000.

“We submitted over 1000 redress applications and the process was a harrowing experience for applicants with many telling their story in considerable detail for the first time.”

Mr Eggington says many victims of institutional child sexual abuse are unlikely to differentiate between the levels of state and federal government authority.

“When victims come forward to disclose a history of sexual abuse to the ‘state’ as they did with ‘Redress WA’—and possibly before that with the *Bringing Them Home* report—they believe they have informed the authorities.

“Many of our clients do not see any benefit in coming forward; particularly when there is no monetary compensation on offer and given that they have already suffered emotionally through the ‘Redress WA’ experience.”

ALSWA staff members have also raised concerns over a lack of awareness of the Commission in the Aboriginal community. Royal Commission Project Officer, Suzanne Randall—whose position is funded by the Federal Attorney-General's Department—says not enough Aboriginal people are coming forward.

“This is due to a lack of knowledge of the Commission, how it works, its purpose and outcomes.

“I'm also concerned with a lack of ongoing consultation with ALSWA and other stakeholders. For example, the Commission travelled to the Kimberley area in June 2014 to meet with Aboriginal people without notifying ALSWA.”

Mr Eggington further says that despite the barriers created by past schemes and inquiries, the work of this Royal Commission is significant for many Indigenous communities.

“This edition of the ILB shows that the work of the Commission will be a definitive voice on the history of institutional child sexual abuse in Australia.

“It would be a great injustice if the disproportionate impact on the Aboriginal peoples in WA was not part of this narrative.”

To read ALSWA's article in full [click here](#).

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