

**KEEPING THE CHILDREN WITH US & TWO BOOKLETS
LAUNCH SPEECH BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AM
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
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I would like to pay respect to the traditional and original owners of this land the Muwinina people — to pay respects to those that have passed before us and to acknowledge today's Tasmanian Aboriginal community who are the custodians of this land.

It is a great pleasure to be here today to launch these three publications of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, the Report, *Keeping our Children with Us* authored by Heather Sculthorpe and the booklets for *Palawa Kids Can Say No* and *Family Violence is not OK!* This is particularly a pleasure for me, as long ago I was one of Heather's lecturers at the Law Faculty. She was an outstanding student and I have watched her career and admired her work for many years.

It is, I think, important for me to point out that in launching this thoroughly researched publication, *Keeping our Children with Us*, I am not automatically endorsing its list of recommendations. Rather, as the Governor of Tasmania and with an overarching responsibility to represent the Tasmanian community in social and cultural matters, my role today is to acknowledge the good work that is being done by Heather Sculthorpe and colleagues to frankly address an issue that is of great concern to all of us, namely how we can improve the child welfare and child protection system to better address the needs of vulnerable young Tasmanians and young Tasmanian Aboriginal children in particular. How do we address the issue of the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child welfare and protection system and in out of home care?

The Centre's project which gave rise to this report has quite a history. What was the best way to tackle the removal of its children from the community? Was the best approach to be part of the system designed for the protection of all children, or to investigate the possibilities of re-establishing a system for Aboriginal control of the welfare and safety of Aboriginal children and families?

In 2005 the then Minister for Health and Human Services, David Llewellyn MHA, as part of Bacon Labor Government's commitment to Aboriginal self-

determination, agreed to fund a research project to determine the wishes and capacity of the Aboriginal community to provide for the care, protection and placement of Aboriginal children.

The core argument of the Report is that:

‘Empowerment, capacity building, community development and self-determination are all notions that cannot be achieved without returning decision-making [to the Aboriginal community].’¹

The Report documents the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child protection system.

‘There are 5 in every 1000 non-Aboriginal children in out of home care in Australia whereas the rate for Aboriginal children is 55 in every 1000 children. On all indicators, Aboriginal children are faring far worse than other children.’²

So while the existence of stolen generations of Aboriginal children was a by-product of Australian social policy, a new phenomenon has been occurring as Aboriginal children are being removed in ever-increasing numbers as part of a child ‘protection’ policy.

To quote from the Report: ‘It is this high-handed approach to Aboriginal children, families and community, and this seeming determination of State authorities to take over decision-making, that led to the current project.’³

The Report makes many important observations and there are many lessons to be learnt from the discussion of child protection in other Australian States and First Nations. And the important point is made that attempts to change parental behaviour will always have limited results as it leaves untouched the societal and systemic factors that underlie child neglect, namely social disadvantage arising from unemployment and poverty.⁴

This Report deserves to be thoroughly read and its recommendations should be carefully considered.

¹ Report, ii.

² Report, 13.

³ Report, 2.

⁴ Report, 70-71.

As well as commending the *Keeping our Children with Us* Report, I should also make reference to the two booklets. *Palawa Kids Can Say No* explains sexual abuse and what to do about inappropriate touching in a way that is accessible to children. And *Family Violence is Not OK!* has some suggestions about what to do if there is a family fight. Both of these books will be very useful in helping inform kids what to do when confronted with issues of sexual abuse or family violence.

Congratulations again to the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre for these publications.