

1. Today is officially the last day of my term as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner.
2. As I start to reflect on my tenure and in this moment, in the context of a country's reconciliation journey, the impact of the Referendum outcome cannot be understated. That has been perhaps the single biggest blow to the possibility and promise of reconciliation.
3. That the answer to one question, on one particular Saturday would be weaponised, gives license to dismantle decades of perhaps small, but significant process. One word, in response to one question unleashed an era of shameless ignorance and unmasked the bigotry that had hidden in plain sight at the tables where decisions are made and the spaces where power is held. And most evidently where extraordinary power is exercised in the lives of Aboriginal children.
4. I have witnessed cruelty codified in QLD law, a wilful disregard of known, harmful consequences, and the abandonment of evidence in policy decision making.
5. I have seen the deliberate dismantling of First Nations governance and advisory bodies, the erasure of FN Leadership roles in the SES, the departure of our thought leaders from spaces that desperately need them, the silencing of advocacy bodies and the identity crisis within our own institutions trying to be who they were created to be while being who they are expected to be if they expect to be funded.

6. I have seen this and felt it in real time.
7. But the power that I stand in, has nothing to do with my former title. It stems from a set of fundamental truths, that cannot be erased - the strength and sovereignty of our children, the resistance and persistence of our old people and that justice, or at least the pursuit of it is the thing that brings good humans together, across cultures, sectors, disciplines, tax brackets, that power in a common purpose that binds us regardless of where we have come from.
8. That is the power that makes reconciliation possible, but only if “all in” means every week, not just this one.
9. What does it mean to go “all in” for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families?
10. “All in” cannot just mean feeling sad when another Aboriginal child dies.
11. It cannot mean acknowledgements, themed weeks and carefully worded statements while governments continue running systems they already know are harming our children.
12. And it cannot mean calling the management of harm, “care”.
13. We need to be honest about that.
14. This country has become extraordinarily comfortable investigating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suffering instead of ending it.

15. We investigate. We review. We inquire. We apologise.
16. And then we continue down the same path.
17. Meanwhile, children are forced to grow up inside the consequences of those choices.
18. After years in this role, I have come to believe one of the most dangerous things in Australia is not ignorance.
19. It's familiarity.
20. The ease with which extraordinary harm becomes ordinary. The speed with which injustice becomes administration.
21. The way suffering, repeated often enough, stops being treated as an emergency and starts being treated as a feature of the landscape.
22. We know what is happening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
23. The question is not whether we know. The question is, what it means that we know and continue anyway.
24. We know children do better connected to family, culture, community and Country.
25. We know early support works better than crisis intervention.
26. We know punitive systems do not heal trauma.
27. We know housing matters.

28. We know healthcare matters.
29. We know connection matters.
30. We know that when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples exercise authority over the decisions affecting their children, outcomes improve.
31. We know what works.
32. And still, we continue down the same path.
33. This raises a question far bigger than any single government.
34. What happens when a society knows what harms children and continues anyway?
35. There are some questions that should never be settled by elections.
36. Some obligations are larger than politics. They belong to a much longer horizon.
37. A child should be safe regardless of who occupies the Treasury benches.
38. A child should have a fair chance in life regardless of which party forms government.
39. And a child who comes into contact with the justice system should leave with more opportunity, more support and more hope than they entered with.

40. These should not be contested propositions.
41. They are the obligations we hold now, and the obligations that one generation owes the next.
42. Because these are not questions about the next election.
43. They are questions about the next generation.
44. Every generation inherits a country it didn't build.
45. Our responsibility is to leave behind one that is kinder, fairer and more courageous than the one we inherited.
46. Politics asks what is possible this term.
47. Children live with the answer for a lifetime.
48. Our children only get one childhood. Governments always get another election.
49. Children do not experience policy in theory. They experience it in time.
50. And childhood is lived in one direction.
51. A child who spends a year in detention does not get that year back.
52. A child removed from family does not recover lost moments simply because a review later identifies mistakes.
53. A child failed by a system cannot return to the beginning and try again once adults finally decide to act.

54. Governments can revisit decisions. Institutions can revisit policies. Commissions can revisit recommendations.
55. Children cannot revisit childhood.
56. Our children live with those decisions long after governments stop talking about them.
57. That is why the treatment of children should never be a partisan project.
58. What does it mean that this country can watch this happen for generation after generation and still think of itself as decent?
59. The tragedy is not ignorance. The tragedy is accommodation.
60. What this country has learned to tolerate.
- 61, What it has normalised. What it has bureaucratised.
61. What it has renamed as “complexity” instead of confronting as the foreseeable consequence of political and policy choices.
62. This country has learned how to publicly mourn Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children while privately maintaining the structures harming them.
63. We have built a country willing to accept levels of surveillance, removal and punishment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children that would provoke national outrage if imposed on other children.

64. A child protection system that removes children faster than it supports families is not a protection system.
65. There is nothing protective about separating children from culture, family and community and then calling the resulting grief “care”.
66. And in youth justice, punishment has become this country’s substitute for courage.
67. And a poor substitute for actual policy.
68. It is political cowardice disguised as strength and paid for by children.
69. Sure, detention creates the illusion of action.
70. But there is nothing courageous about governments appearing tough on children while refusing to address poverty, housing instability, racism and intergenerational trauma.
71. Because it is easier to criminalise children than confront the conditions governments have repeatedly failed to change.
72. And then this country has the audacity to call these children resilient. As though resilience is the goal.
73. Safety should be.
74. What does it say about us that we admire children's resilience more than we question the conditions requiring it?

75. And honestly, in my experience many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children inside our statutory systems have shown more courage, humanity and moral clarity than the systems supposedly designed to protect them.
76. Because children keep telling the truth, while institutions protect themselves.
77. How easily this country absorbs another inquiry, another devastated family, and then continues.
78. The real question is not whether Australia knows what is happening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
79. The real question is what it means that we know and continue anyway.
80. At best, it reflects a profound indifference to the suffering of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
81. At worst, it reflects a belief that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not worth the political cost of change.
82. Australia does not suffer from a lack of evidence about what harms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
83. It suffers from a failure to reform or relinquish those systems producing that harm.
84. People frequently mistake the performance of virtue for the practice of it.



85. We mistake gestures for change.
86. Ceremony for accountability.
87. We become comfortable saying the right things while leaving the underlying conditions untouched.
88. We seek the relief of appearing committed without paying the cost of commitment.
89. But that is not what being “all in” means.
90. “All in” is what happens when change requires something from us.
91. When power must be shared.
92. When institutions must be redesigned.
93. When accountability becomes uncomfortable.
94. When the political cost of doing the right thing arrives.
95. That is the test.
96. Whether they are willing to change the structures producing the harm.
97. Because a commitment that disappears the moment it becomes difficult means we were never “all in” to begin with.
98. Premier, this government cannot keep wrapping itself in the language of reconciliation while dismantling truth telling, abandoning Treaty processes and overseeing the

systematic erasure of Aboriginal leadership from the highest levels of government in Queensland.

99. The removal of Aboriginal voices from positions of influence across Queensland is not a symbolic issue.
100. It changes who decisions are made with.
101. It changes who decisions are made for.
102. And ultimately, it changes the quality of those decisions.
103. I have sat at tables with you and your representatives for many years.
104. I have appeared before your Parliamentary Committees.
105. I have watched and experienced firsthand and up close your government's deep discomfort with Aboriginal authority.
106. "Walking together", "healing", "partnership" and "shared future" is government speak — nobody serious is buying it.
107. Because what Queensland is witnessing doesn't even resemble reconciliation.
108. Turns out mission thinking didn't disappear in Queensland. It just hired a new branding team.
109. Control becomes "care". Surveillance becomes "safety". Punishment becomes "protection".

110. And somewhere along the way, this government confused slogans for policy.
111. Strategy shouldn't fit on a bumper sticker. If it does, it isn't strategy.
112. This government's approach to youth justice and child protection policy amounts to a wilful disregard of evidence and a gross indifference to the rights of Aboriginal children branded as a commitment to "keeping communities safe".
113. Children should not have to spend years recovering from the institutions entrusted with their care.
114. Yet too often, they do.
115. So, when governments say they are all in for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, my response is simple:
116. Prove it in budgets, legislation and who holds power.
117. Prove it through quality, enforceable oversight.
118. Prove it by funding prevention more urgently than funding punishment.
119. Prove it by understanding that self-determination is a right, not a threat.
120. Our children cannot live inside promises, and governments should stop asking them to.
121. And after decades of inquiries, reports, apologies and reform agendas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

children are still being asked to carry the consequences of systems that already know better.

122. And if Australians are all in, then prove it by refusing to become numb to these outcomes.

123. Refuse to accept overrepresentation as normal or inevitable.

124. Refuse to keep calling this reconciliation while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue experiencing grossly unequal outcomes.

125. And nowhere is the gap between what we say and what we do more visible than in the treatment of Aboriginal leadership itself.

126. Reconciliation is not measured by what you say.

127. It is measured by what governments are prepared to share.

128. Power. Authority. Decision-making.

129. And increasingly, what Queensland is witnessing is not the expansion of Aboriginal authority.

130. Its contraction.

131. History has taught us repeatedly what happens when governments make decisions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children without Aboriginal people at the table.

132. Yet here we are. Again.

133. On the eve of another round of child protection reform.
134. Still speaking the language of partnership while authority is withdrawn.
135. Still speaking of reconciliation while Aboriginal leadership is diminished.
136. Still speaking of shared decision-making while Aboriginal voices are removed from the rooms where decisions are made.
137. Still speaking of shared futures while power becomes more concentrated and less shared.
138. What Queensland is witnessing does not look like reconciliation.
139. Reconciliation requires trust. It requires shared authority.
140. It requires a willingness to relinquish power, not merely consult those excluded from it.
141. What Queensland is witnessing is something else.
142. A retreat from the principles that make reconciliation possible.
143. And nowhere is that more evident than in youth justice and child protection.
144. Queenslanders reasonably expect that children placed in state care or detention will not emerge more traumatised,

more criminalised and more harmed than when they entered those systems.

145. Yet for a huge number of children, this is precisely what happens.

146. The public is being told Adult time, Adult crime is a solution, when the global evidence is remarkably consistent: they are more likely to deepen offending, increase system contact and worsen outcomes for children and communities alike.

147. The public is being invited to accept political certainty as a substitute for actual evidence. The public is being asked to place considerable faith in policies that are inconsistent with what decades of evidence would predict.

148. At a time when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children remain subject to some of the most intensive forms of state intervention through child protection, policing and youth justice systems the Children's Commissioner role now remains vacant.

149. No Aboriginal oversight.

150. No independent Aboriginal authority.

151. No Aboriginal voice at the highest level monitoring systems capable of removing, surveilling, criminalising and detaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

152. Governments do not accidentally leave vacant the positions designed to challenge their power.

153. They make choices.

154. The question is what the rest of us do when those choices are made.
155. Because moments like this reveal something important.
156. Not only about governments. But about institutions. About Commissioners. About oversight bodies. About the public service.
157. About all of us.
158. Will we adjust ourselves to the new reality?
159. Will we quietly lower our expectations?
160. Will we learn to accommodate what we once would have challenged?
161. Or will we insist that children deserve better?
162. Because silence is not neutrality.
163. And institutional caution is not leadership.
164. The true character of an institution is not revealed when its mandate is popular.
165. It is revealed when its mandate becomes inconvenient. When pressure increases.
166. When expectations narrow.
167. When speaking plainly carries a cost.

168. That is the moment institutions discover what they are prepared to defend.
169. And what they are prepared to surrender.
170. There are moments in public life when those entrusted with authority, independence and public confidence are called upon to remember why those institutions exist.
171. This is one of them.
172. Ultimately, societies are judged by the future they make possible for children.
173. By whether children inherit more hope or more harm.
174. More justice or more excuses.
175. Because every generation leaves something behind.
176. Will children inherit our courage?
177. Or will they inherit the consequences of our caution?
178. History will answer that question.
179. But children will live with the answer.
180. And Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children should not have to keep surviving a country already capable of doing better.