

# Abuse plan flawed

● From Page 1

family and community safety and wellbeing.

The plan involves police, health, community services and other related government agencies undertaking state-wide and local initiatives aimed at targeting communities most in need, including:

- Increased police surveillance and evidence gathering.
- More resources for witness assistance programs and forensic examinations.
- More victim support and counselling.
- Expanded sexual assault medical services for children.
- Enhanced drug and alcohol programs.
- A State-wide Advisory Panel to monitor the recommendations.

The plan encompasses 88 separate actions flowing from the Taskforce's 99 recommendations.

Releasing the plan on 4 January, the then-Acting Premier and Minister for Police John Watkins said the Taskforce report had illustrated the complexity of the problem.

"This report showed that despite our best efforts to date, the rate of child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities remains unacceptably high and under-reported," he said.

"This has a devastating impact on the lives of the children who

experience it."

Mr Watkins said the plan struck a balance between the strong law enforcement action needed to crack down on criminal activity and the importance of early intervention and prevention services to help families at risk.

"There is no easy solution to the terrible scourge of child sexual abuse, so the response in each location will be different," he said.

However, Ms Ella-Duncan told the Koori Mail the failure to allocate new monies and/or resources would just pile more pressure on departments and agencies already ill-equipped and unable to meet their responsibilities, despite the best intentions of CEOs.

"The plan didn't attract any new money so agencies have to find resources within existing budgets to implement the recommendations," she said.

"In order to find that money, they're going to have to take it from somewhere. There's no assurance that it won't be taken from existing Aboriginal programs and that's a real tragedy.

"The Taskforce report



**MARCIA ELLA-DUNCAN.** "Compensating people for cross-city tunnels, bailing out tunnel operators, that is not going to save lives."

"There's no commitment to start new processes in the criminal justice and social protection systems. It indicates a lack of courage to tackle this issue in a meaningful way.

"By comparison, the NSW Government has made a couple of big budget commitments to issues that I think are trivial by comparison.

"Compensating people for cross-city tunnels and bailing out tunnel operators, that is not going to save lives. A good investment made at the right time around child sexual assault would undoubtedly save lives and would improve outcomes for Aboriginal people."

Ms Ella-Duncan said the Government's decision to release the report on 4 January when most Australians were on Christmas holidays had breached an assurance from the Premier Morris Iemma that the taskforce would be involved in its release. "It is really hard to counter community statements like 'the Government is not doing anything' and 'there's no-one we can trust'

when you don't have faith the process so far," she said.

Ms Ella-Duncan said the plan lacked detail such as the terms of reference for the monitoring advisory panel. The Taskforce had argued strongly against a locational response that targeted 'focus communities' that showed acute levels of disadvantage and dysfunction. "The Government argued that it could get data statistics to evaluate but if they pick three high-incidence communities, they also need to pick three low incident communities," she said.

"We visited a range of demographically different communities and found the level of concern was the same and that was regardless of the frequency of child sexual assault and the extent of the problem."

Ms Ella-Duncan urged Indigenous communities to consider any local action that highlighted the issue of child sexual abuse.

Her comments were supported by a senior bureaucrat who contacted the Koori Mail concerned about the lack of new funding.

The person, who asked not to be named but works within a body mentioned in the interagency plan as sharing responsibility for action on the issue, said their organisation was already stretched beyond its capacity.

recommended substantial changes. Of most concern, of course, was the lack of counselling and therapy support for victims and their families and treatment programs for perpetrators.

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# This time, it's us in the news

**H**ow time flies when you're having fun – and approaching a deadline!

The voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia, the Koori Mail newspaper, is turning 400.

We'll mark the milestone of our 400th edition, due out on 9 May this year, with a gala dinner in our home town of Lismore on the NSW far north coast on 12 May.

The event will feature Emma Donovan, Foot Fulla Bindies, Sean Choolburra and local traditional dancers.

The Koori Mail was started by Aboriginal man Owen Carriage and his wife Sue. After a short time, the Carriages sold the paper, with five Aboriginal organisations – Nungera Co-operative (Maclean), Bundjalung Tribal Society (Lismore), Kurrachee Co-operative (Coraki), Buyinbin (Casino) and Bunjum Co-operative (Cabbage Tree Island) – each taking a 20 per cent stake,



which they still hold today.

Koori Mail Chairperson Russell Kapeen, of the Kurrachee Co-operative, said the dinner marking the 400th edition would be a grand event.

"It'll be a first for Australia and an opportunity for Aboriginal community organisations of Lismore, Coraki, Maclean, Cabbage Tree Island and Casino to shine," he said.

"This milestone will bring many of our valued supporters together with influential Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander guests from around the country."

Mr Kapeen said he was proud that the newspaper

was bigger and better than ever.

"The Board couldn't be prouder that the Koori Mail is still here as a 100 per cent Aboriginal-owned, controlled, and self-funded newspaper," he said.

"We owe much of our success to the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

"We'll proudly continue to be the leading voice of Indigenous Australians, by reporting the news that matters from an Indigenous perspective as well as highlighting the positive achievements of our people and communities."

● **The gala dinner marking the 400th edition of the Koori Mail will be held in Bundjalung Country, at the Lismore Workers Club, Lismore, on Saturday 12 May from 6pm. Tickets are available by phoning (02) 6622 2666 and asking for Solua Middleton or Naomi Moran.**

For details email [400@koorimail.com](mailto:400@koorimail.com)