

2 March 2007

Mr Mike Baird
Liberal Candidate for Manly
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Dear Mr Baird

As the National Director of Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) and a resident of Fairlight in the Manly electorate, I seek your assistance in helping secure appropriate funding for a future Debnam Government's response to *Breaking the Silence*, a 300 page report on child abuse in Aboriginal communities.

As you may be aware, *Breaking the Silence* was commissioned by the current NSW Government and written by a task force headed by Aboriginal leader, Marcia Ella-Duncan. It found that child abuse in Aboriginal communities had reached "epidemic proportions," with child sexual assault up to four times the rate of the general population. According to Ms Ella-Duncan, the report paints a "stark picture of intergenerational abuse and social disadvantage."

Aboriginal people from around the state showed great courage in speaking to the task force about such a traumatic and difficult subject. They had hoped for a decent response from the lemma Government.

These hopes were dashed when the Government announced its response containing 88 sensible recommendations, but not a skerrick of additional funding to assist their implementation. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that three Ministers including the Attorney General argued for between \$20 and \$40 million per year to fund the package. However, they were blocked by Treasurer Michael Costa, who apparently had other priorities.

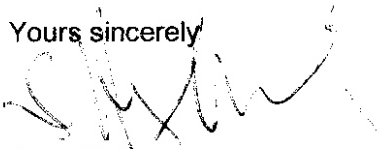
When I read about this I was angered that the Government could play with the lives of children in such a callous and cynical way. However, I was also angered that the Opposition sought to score political points out of the issue, but also made no commitment to fund the response. It seems to me that both sides of politics have so far declined to fund the package because these are Aboriginal children at risk and it has been calculated that not enough voters would care.

I want to let you know that this issue more than any other will determine how I will vote on March 24. I know that many of my organisation's 30 thousand supporters in NSW feel the same way.

Accordingly, I urge you to lobby the Opposition Leader to commit to properly funding the response to *Breaking the Silence* as a priority of a future Debnam Government. There is still time before the election to demonstrate that your party offers a genuine alternative in relation to the fundamental issue of keeping this state's children free from abuse, but only if you act quickly.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further with you.

Yours sincerely



Gary Highland
National Director