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ANTaR - URGENT ACTION ON PETROL SNIFFING NEEDED

Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) has called for urgent action on petrol sniffing following an inquest into the deaths of three petrol sniffers in Central Australia.

“ANTaR supports the recommendation by the Central Australian Youth Link Up Service (CAYLUS) for an immediate expansion of the Opal non-sniffable petrol rollout across the Central Australian Cross Border region”, ANTaR National Director, David Cooper, said.

“Coroner, Greg Cavanagh, described Opal petrol as a ‘practical and pragmatic’ solution”, Mr Cooper said.

“A problem with the current Federal Government subsidy of Opal fuel is that it is a patchwork, leaving many communities and regional sources where sniffable petrol can be obtained. Two of the deaths which are the subject of the current inquiry are from communities not covered by the current Opal scheme.

“Not expanding the scheme will mean significantly higher social and economic impacts.

“In the next few years in the Northern Territory alone the cost of caring for the expected additional 120 sniffers likely to acquire brain damage is a staggering \$24 million per year. This compares with a cost of \$8-9 million to extend the subsidy of Opal across the Central region.

“Expanding the Opal scheme will save lives, reduce the horrendous impacts on families and communities and save on future health costs.

“Expanding the scheme needs to be matched with more resources and commitment from governments to address the impacts of the over 700 petrol sniffers in the Central Australian Cross Border region. This means addressing the lack of essential services in remote communities and increased support for community initiatives to deal with substance abuse.

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Background facts

- Petrol is usually the cheapest drug of choice for young people in remote communities
- Many users have sustained Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) and serious physical disabilities. A few are in full time supported care, while families, often ageing parents, bear the burden of caring for others
- Recent figures in 2004* show that on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands in the far north-west of South Australia alone, 8.4% of the population – 222 out of around 2700 - were sniffing petrol. *(Nganampa Health Council).
- There are at least 500 petrol sniffers in the Central Desert Region and in some areas up to ten per cent of the population is sniffing.
- There is a very high level of violence and general dysfunction amongst petrol sniffers. Sniffing greatly reduces sexual inhibition, which in turn causes a number of problems including STDs and unplanned pregnancies.
- A recent evaluation of the COMGAS Scheme found that ‘the principal factor affecting the supply of petrol to a community is the proximity of the nearest source.’ (Dpt Health & Ageing, 2004:33)

For more information on OPAL go to: http://www.bp.com.au/products/fuels/opal/Opal_factsheet.pdf