

# jenny macklin mp

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**Transcript of Doorstop – Heidelberg, VICTORIA**

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**E & OE - PROOF ONLY**

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**Subject: Federal measures on child abuse in Indigenous communities**

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JOURNALIST: This is quite a radical plan that's been announced, what's your initial response to it?

JENNY MACKLIN: I think the important thing to say at the outset is that no Australian child, whether they're an Indigenous child or a non-Indigenous child deserves to be abused and neglected in the way that the shocking report from the Northern Territory last week demonstrates. The horrific levels of child abuse that have now been made public really do require urgent action from all levels of government, both sides of politics. We do really all have to act together in the interests of protecting these children.

JOURNALIST: So you with the Prime Minister's plan to virtually take over the running of Aboriginal settlements in the Northern Territory?

MACKLIN: What Labor's said is that we offer our bipartisan, in principle support because we do think these are very, very serious levels of abuse and neglect. Of course the Government has yet to produce the legislation, they've indicated to us that the legislation is yet weeks away. We look forward to working with the Government on that legislation. We've said we will do everything we possibly can to help deal with these shocking levels of abuse.

JOURNALIST: The Prime Minister said this morning that the Northern Territory Government has virtually sat on the report for two months, if the matter was so urgent why do you think they did that?

MACKLIN: I think that the important thing today, and from here on, is to say let's not point the finger of blame at either side of politics, at either level of government. We don't intend to do that. What we intend to do is to put politics to one side. We think in the interests of children, in the interests of the safety of so

many children in these communities that we have to work together to address what is a very serious level of abuse and neglect.

JOURNALIST: The Prime Minister is also talking about rolling out the welfare quarantine and the welfare plans to other parts outside of Indigenous communities. Is that something that's needed?

MACKLIN: Well I think we have to recognise that there are many, many children, unfortunately, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children who are being abused in communities in many parts of Australia. That's why we all have a responsibility to really do everything we possibly can to address it. I do think that will require action not only in the Northern Territory but in other parts of Australia. So we will look at all of the detail that's put forward and we have said that we will do everything that is possible to address these shocking levels of abuse.

JOURNALIST: Could these be considered short term measures. Your colleague Stephen Smith has come out and said they seem short term. Would there be a need for long term measures?

MACKLIN: I think we need both. I think we need urgent action to address some of the very shocking issues that are taking place right now. But we also know that we need adequate levels of schooling, higher numbers of teachers, doctors, nurses, working in Aboriginal communities to address both the education and health needs that people have. Let me just give you one example of what's happening on Groote Eylandt, where they themselves have said they've been to hell and back. They have addressed the shocking levels of alcohol abuse with a very strong permit system, with strong Indigenous leadership, strong local policing, but what they also know is that they're going to have to address the shocking levels of literacy and numeracy in that community, that's going to take a long term concerted effort on education. They also know that people need work, they need employment, and they're only going to get the jobs that are available there if people are properly educated. So we need both short term emergency responses, but we also need long term concerted action to address the education, employment, health, housing issues that are so critical.

JOURNALIST: Have you yourself been up to those communities?

MACKLIN: I've been to many of these communities, and there's no question that urgent action is required. There's also evidence that when local communities working with their local police put in place controls on alcohol for example, or make a concerted effort to really turn their educational disadvantage around, that change is possible. So I really look forward to both sides of politics working together, both levels of government working together with the Indigenous leadership to address what is a shocking level of child abuse.

JOURNALIST: Do you think that the Aboriginal elders have let the team down by not taking care of the problem themselves and allowing it to flourish?

MACKLIN: I think there are many, many elders in these communities who are looking for urgent action. If you talk to many of the women elders in these communities, many of the mothers and grandmothers, they want the sort of protection that is now being talked about. They have been calling for it for a very long time. So we do need to work with them to provide the sort of support and protection that many of them are seeking.

JOURNALIST: If this is rolled out to other states, wouldn't the state government's take a dimmer view though?

MACKLIN: I think many of the states will in fact recognise that this is an opportunity to address what are very high levels of abuse in their states as well. We know that this is very serious in the Northern Territory but we also know from reports in other states that the levels of child abuse there also need urgent action. So no doubt there will be additional effort put in in those states where it's really needed.

JOURNALIST: Is there any backlash, can you see any backlash from Aboriginal communities across the nation?

MACKLIN: I think what's important today is for all of us to recognise just how urgent this action is, how much these children and the responsible adults in those communities are really looking for the sort of protection, the sort of urgent action on alcohol delivery and abuse, that they have been calling for for some time. So let's actually get in there and fix the problems.

JOURNALIST: Bob Brown said last night that the Prime Minister has had 11 years to fix this and he's just waited until the imminent election, what's your response to that?

MACKLIN: Once again I don't think that there is anything to be gained by pointing the finger of blame. I think we all have to take responsibility for failing these Aboriginal children. Both sides of politics from the Prime Minister down. I certainly take our share of responsibility for past inaction. I'm sure the Prime Minister would recognise his responsibility as well. The important thing now is to act, it is not to point the finger of blame.

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