

Palm Island

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From: Tarwirri (Indigenous Law Students and Lawyers Association of Victoria)

15 years after Royal Commission, Aboriginal people still waiting for justice

The death of Mulrunji Doomadgee on Palm Island in 2004 and the failure of the Queensland Government to properly deal with this tragedy has demonstrated yet again the failure of Australian governments to deliver justice to Aboriginal people.

“The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was set up in response to the concern that Aboriginal deaths in custody were too common and public explanation too evasive. Fifteen years later, little appears to have changed,” said Abbie Burchill, treasurer of Tarwirri (the Indigenous Law Students and Lawyers Association of Victoria).

The investigations carried out by the Queensland authorities after the death seem to have raised more questions than they answer. Was the initial investigation biased? Why have the inquiries taken so long? Why has no disciplinary action been taken against the police officer involved?

“This death should never have happened,” said Ms Burchill.

“Mulrunji Doomadgee was arrested for drunkenness in the middle of the day and taken to a police lock up where he was allowed to die several hours later. At the very least the Queensland police appear to have totally failed in their duty of care to Mr Doomadgee.”

The Royal Commission’s report was tabled in 1991, had more than 100,000 pages of transcript and was eleven volumes thick. What has it achieved?

The death demonstrates the absolute failure to implement the Royal Commission’s recommendations.

It is a travesty that these deaths are still occurring.

Tarwirri sends its deepest condolences to the family of Mulrunji Doomadgee and to the people of Palm Island.