
Scullion briefed last year on NT abuse report

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MICHAEL BRISSENDEN: When Four Corners aired graphic footage of children being abused in Darwin's Don Dale Detention Centre, the Indigenous Affairs Minister, Nigel Scullion, said he didn't know about the abuse because he hadn't been told about it.

Now, the Northern Territory Senator has revealed he did receive a brief from his department last October, about a report done for the Northern Territory Government on the abuse, and media coverage of it.

It comes as the former Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma, adds his voice for those calling for the Minister to be replaced.

From Canberra Peta Donald reports.

PETA DONALD: The day after seeing Four Corners, Nigel Scullion said he was shocked to the core.

On the weekend the Indigenous Affairs Minister apologised at the Garma festival in Arnhem Land, for relying on the Northern Territory Government to keep him informed.

Now he says he did ask his Department for information in October last year, after seeing a story in the media about the report by the NT Children's Commissioner.

NIGEL SCULLION: Well, it was for a question time brief. We'd seen it in the paper and I said "Listen, what can you tell me about this, this might come up".

The report basically just provided a bit of background about the commissioners report when it was published.

And it talked about- it said it looked at the use of tear gas during a three-hour siege by inmates.

It talked about the report explaining approval to transfer five young people under the Youth Justice Act.

It quoted some other media stories, but uh... and it provided some media stories.

PETA DONALD: Media stories at the time reported much of the abuse shown by Four Corners.

The stories back then reported children being tear gassed in their cells, held for up to 17 days in solitary confinement and hooded.

An ABC online story quoted a prison guard recorded threatening to pulverise a detainee.

The Minister says it wasn't as evocative as seeing the abuse on CCTV, obtained by Four Corners.

Senator Scullion says the advice from his department was that it was up to the NT Government to consider the findings of the report from the Children's Commissioner.

He told Radio National Drive he and his department could have done better.

NIGEL SCULLION: I should have known. I should have had processes in place to ensure that I knew earlier.

PETA DONALD: The former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma, has added his voice to those calling for the Minister to go.

He cites Nigel Scullion's initial lack of interest in what was going on at Don Dale.

TOM CALMA: Any minister who is not willing to engage with the community they represent and want to listen to them and work cooperatively with them, shouldn't be a minister.

PETA DONALD: Senator Scullion would have liked to hear it from Tom Calma himself.

NIGEL SCULLION: I've obviously lost the confidence of Tom, and I have to say it is a great disappointment to me.

PETA DONALD: The Prime Minister is moving on with the issue of Indigenous recognition in the Constitution.

This morning he'll sit down to talk about it with the Labor Leader, Bill Shorten, in their first meeting since the election.

Malcolm Turnbull has warned Labor against pushing for a treaty as well as recognition, saying it could jeopardise the success of a referendum.

The Minister, Nigel Scullion, argues rather than ruling out a treaty at this point, the Referendum Council should be allowed to consult Indigenous Australians and make a recommendation.

NIGEL SCULLION: It's through that engagement process. If that's what Indigenous Australians, if that's what the process tells us what to do, well that's what it is - so that's what their view will be.

MICHAEL BRISSENDEN: Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion, on Radio National last night.