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NEW SOUTH WALES ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL

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Aboriginal Leader Calls for More Police

A senior NSW Aboriginal leader has supported calls for a greater police presence in the far north coast region amid media reports of riots in the coastal town of Yamba over the weekend.

Patricia Laurie, elected Councillor for the North Coast region of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council also called on media – particularly Sydney-based media – to report the incident honestly and constructively.

Over the weekend, a party at an industrial area in Yamba ended with the arrest of 15 people.

“Only three of those people were Aboriginal, and one of those was a juvenile. The remaining 12 people arrested were non Indigenous.

“I’m pleased that Nationals MP Steve Cansdell has publicly acknowledged that this was not an ‘Indigenous issue’. However, I’m concerned that regardless of the facts, some sections of the media are still trying to lay the blame at the feet of the Aboriginal community.

“Like all segments of the community, Indigenous Australians are responsible for their share of crime – no-one is disputing that. But the shock jocks and alarmists trying to make out that the Aboriginal community of Yamba in any way caused this violent confrontation with police are flat out wrong.”

Cr Laurie said that while she was pleased local police had acknowledged that many people at the party were upset by the conduct of some, she called on local officials to ensure that police also behaved appropriately.

“The most crucial part of the policing process is often the first response by police – the officers who arrive on the scene first,” Cr Laurie said.

“These police have a key role in diffusing the situation, but occasionally you’ll find a first response officer who will actually work actively to inflame the situation.

“Unfortunately, just as there are a minority of Aboriginal people who cause trouble, there are a few officers in this region who routinely do precisely that.

“Those police should be put on notice: Aboriginal people will treat you with the same respect you treat them.”

Cr Laurie said that sort of policing practice – and the misinformed reporting by mainstream media – did nothing to assist regional communities.

“In my region, we’re working hard to form lasting partnerships with non Indigenous Australians – police included. Yamba is a multi-cultural town and most people here get along very well.

“This sort of trash reporting by some sections of the media does not assist that process. If only these big media outlets liked facts as much as they liked stirring up conflict.”

Cr Laurie added that the NSW Aboriginal Land Council would be watching closely outcomes from the incident in Yamba over the weekend.

“The NSW Aboriginal Land Council is taking an active interest in the incarceration rates of Aboriginal men and women in this state.

“Currently, NSW jails black males at a rate more than five times greater than South Africa jailed black males at the end of the Apartheid era.

“That shames us all, and it comes despite the fact that a recent NSW study by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research found more Aboriginal people were being jailed, and for longer, while offence rates were not increasing.

“With that in mind, the NSW Aboriginal Land Council is looking forward to working cooperatively with local authorities to help ensure Aboriginal people are not unfairly targeted.”

Cr Laurie also called on the NSW Government to provide adequate resources to the Yamba community.

“This government has known for more than a decade that the Yamba community is growing at a pace that is out-stripping the provision of basic resources.

“The NSW Government needs to properly plan for the future. Unfortunately for Yamba residents, they’re finding out first hand what it’s like for Aboriginal people in terms of the provision of basic services by government.”

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