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Dr Nelson breaks “unconditional” commitment to parliament

Opposition Leader Brendan Nelson's decision to pull out of the bipartisan commission to improve housing in Aboriginal communities flies in the face of undertakings he gave in parliament during his apology to the Stolen Generations.

During his apology speech in Parliament on the 13th of February, Dr Nelson gave his "unconditional" support for the Prime Minister's proposal.

Dr Nelson said, "I ... offer on behalf of the opposition my unconditional support to participate in the commission for policy which he proposes. This is far, far more important than any of the things that would normally divide us as a nation in philosophy and politics."

ANTaR National Director, Gary Highland said he felt “gutted” that Dr Nelson has gone back on his commitment to the Parliament and Aboriginal people only three months after making it.

“In order for to it to work, membership of the commission has to be acceptable to both the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition. Dr Nelson is playing politics by now seeking to place unreasonable conditions over one individual’s involvement in the commission,” Mr Highland said.

Mr Highland said there were sound reasons why former Minister, Mal Brough should not serve on the commission.

"There’s no doubt that Mr Brough maintains a genuine commitment to overcoming Aboriginal disadvantage, boosting economic development in Aboriginal communities and overcoming violence and abuse. He has potentially much to contribute in these areas."

“However, during his time as Minister, Mal Brough failed to act in a bipartisan way and alienated many Aboriginal people by his heavy handed tactics. He’s therefore unsuitable for a bipartisan commission of this kind,” Mr Highland said.

Mr Highland urged Dr Nelson to stand by his original commitment to the Parliament.

"The desperate need for housing in Aboriginal Australia is far more important than any individual - Dr Nelson, Mr Brough - or for that matter even the Prime Minister."

“We desperately need to establish a long-term, bipartisan commitment to solve one of this nation's greatest challenges – ensuring first world standards of housing for the first Australians.”

“It is extremely disappointing that this is now threatened by Dr Nelson's inability to stand by the commitment he made in the Parliament to the Australian people,” Mr Highland said.

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