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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **NACLC: \$19.6m cuts to the CLC sector misguided and short-sighted**

“Today’s Federal Government announcement of cuts of \$43.1m over four years across the four legal assistance services, including \$19.6m from the CLC sector, \$13.41 from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Legal Services and expected cuts to Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Services and Legal Aid Commissions, is extremely short sighted and fails to demonstrate an understanding of the work of these services,” said NACLC National Convenor, Michael Smith.

“At a time of increasing demand for quality legal help for people in need, the governments race to put its budget back into surplus will have huge social and economic costs that will far out-weigh the savings made by cutting \$43.1m from legal assistance services”, said Mr Smith.

Multiple studies and reports demonstrate the cost-benefit of community legal centres, the nearly half-a-million people turned away each year from legal help nationally, and the shortfall in legal assistance across a range of areas of law and in specific geographic locations.

“The cuts are apparently aimed at policy and law reform work. But overwhelmingly, CLC community lawyers and staff provide frontline legal services to people in the community. The information and knowledge gained by this work is invaluable to government and the broader community but the reality is there are not significant staff resources focused on policy projects alone. It is impossible to see how the ‘provision of frontline legal services’ will not be affected by these cuts.

“The cuts to the Environment Defenders Offices (EDOs) across Australia are a major disappointment. Australia has a range of important laws to protect the environment and while these laws are in place, there are many people who need help to understand and work within them, particularly farmers and rural residents. The EDOs provide legal advice and casework to communities whose health, housing and lifestyles are impacted by large developments and these farmers and families will now have nowhere else to go.

“It is also clear that the existing power imbalance in environmental disputes between large corporate interests and local residents will only be exacerbated by this development. The government’s environmental credentials are clearly at issue in this decision.”

Ends

For further information or to arrange an interview contact National Convenor Michael Smith 0421 437 883