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Scullion confronted by NT community Detention abuse Minister told to resign

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Fergus Hunter ct online On web, tablet andmobile See video of confrontation
Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion has been bailed up by members of a remote Northern Territory community over his response to the youth justice revelations that triggered a royal commission.

The NT senator - under pressure last week for conceding that previous reports about the treatment of young detainees had not "piqued his interest" - was driving through Borroloola on Wednesday, 1000 kilometres south-east of Darwin, when about 30 residents flagged him down.

With some calling for Senator Scullion's resignation, the crowd included the aunt of local Jake Roper, one of the former detainees featured in the explosive ABC Four Corners investigation, and other members of his family.

"They went up to Nigel Scullion and were asking him how, as the Indigenous Affairs Minister, he didn't know what was happening to the kids," Larissa Baldwin, national co-director of the Seed Indigenous climate activism group and visiting Borroloola, told Fairfax Media.

"And they were asking him about what was going to happen from the royal commission and whether there would be action taken against the guards. They were saying it's not OK to treat their kids like that."

Senator Scullion - said to be in town to deal with a constituent complaint and caught off-guard by the locals' intervention - responded that he was also shocked by the evidence from the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre and said that he had stood up for an Indigenous co-commissioner on the royal commission "that's what we've got".

He sought to assure locals that the joint Commonwealth-NT investigation was the "highest level of inquiry you could possibly have" and, when told that guards who mistreated youths should be charged and put in prison, voiced agreement if there were criminal charges to be laid.

The mood was described as angry and emotional, with Wendy Roper in tears about the treatment of her nephew. Some people held signs reading "Justice for Jake Roper", "Justice not jail" and "Justice for all children in jail".

Borroloola has a population of about 1000 and is home to the Yanyuwa, Garawa, Gudanji, Mara and Waanyi peoples.

Mr Scullion was questioned by Scott McDinny, a Garawa man, who said waiting for the royal commission's findings wasn't good enough and that people wanted to know whether the prison guards would be punished.

"The minister wasn't really doing his job because he had all the reports there and he wasn't even looking at them, he just put them under the desk and ignored them," Mr McDinny said. "I don't know what he's doing but I hope he resigns soon."

Cory Roper, also related to Jake, said offending youth should be rehabilitated in detention rather than punished and abused. "We're here today to ask [Senator Scullion] to give up his job or just walk away. Or get off our land and don't come back."

The NT senator said last week that, prior to the ABC report, he was not aware of what was happening in the youth detention system.