



June Oscar is new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner



(L-R) Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion, newly named Social Justice Commissioner June Oscar, Indigenous Health Minister Ken Wyatt and Attorney-General George Brandis.

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Australia's new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner is a Kimberley leader who stood up to powerful interests in her hometown, and inside her own family, to rein in devastating levels of alcohol consumption.

In the past decade June Oscar has earned an international reputation as a highly-effective advocate for children and women. In 2007 she successfully lobbied for a ban on full-strength takeaway alcohol in the West Australian pastoral town of Fitzroy Crossing, a community bedevilled by social ills, suicide, domestic violence and child neglect. In the years that followed, she oversaw Australia's first study of a town's rate of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, which revealed the true and lasting impact of excessive alcohol consumption in the Fitzroy Valley. One in five children in the study have permanent brain damage as a result of their mother's drinking while pregnant.

Dr Oscar then established a child learning centre in Fitzroy Crossing that is a therapeutic learning environment for children affected by FASD, but also — more generally — the town's only childcare centre. For the first time it is possible for local parents including Aboriginal women to go to work if they do not have relatives to care for their kids.

In an email of thanks to her colleagues at the Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre today, Dr Oscar wrote that she accepted the new job with apprehension and excitement.

Dr Oscar takes over from Mick Gooda.

"The work we do on the ground is challenging and at times daunting, but because we do it together it is possible," she wrote.

"As I go forward within this role, we will continue to work together to empower women, their children and families to have the life they deserve, while remaining safe and cared for by each other, and demanding that this journey has the full support of our nation. Together, I will ensure that we all remain committed to bringing our universal human rights to our people on the ground and defending them against all the odds."