

NT intervention seen as 'act of war' on Aboriginal people, Nova Peris says

Indigenous former senator says policy was 'partly about a land grab under the guise of other things that demonised us all'



Nova Peris's message was read by Dylan Voller at a conference held in Alice Springs over the weekend to commemorate the intervention's 10-year anniversary. Photograph: Lukas Coch/AAP

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Former Labor senator Nova Peris says the Northern Territory intervention was seen as an “act of war” declared by the government on Aboriginal people.

This month marks the 10th anniversary of the Howard government's emergency response into remote NT Indigenous communities, which was implemented after reports of widespread child sexual abuse.

Peris, Australia's first female Aboriginal federal parliamentarian, said the intervention was “partly about a land grab under the guise of other things that demonised us all as a race of First Nations people”.

“[It] was seen by many, particularly those living on community, as an act of war declared by the Australian government on Aboriginal people,” she said.

The controversial package of welfare, justice and health measures was rolled out in more than 70 communities, and Labor's 2012 Stronger Futures legislation has continued its work.

Peris said Aboriginal people don't need "constitutional recognition in an English founding document" and called for solidarity to demand sovereignty and self-determination.

The Olympian's message was read by former teen inmate Dylan Voller at a conference held in Alice Springs over the weekend to commemorate the intervention's 10-year anniversary.

Voller, whose treatment as a boy behind bars sparked the juvenile justice royal commission, said discrimination against Indigenous children was rife in prison. "They take young people away from their culture," he said.

The inquiry, which is in its last week of hearings in Darwin, was called after footage of Voller being tear-gassed, spit-hooded and shackled was aired on national television.

Voller advocated for more engagement with elders and cultural awareness programs to improve the youth detention system.