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**Call for national response to child sex abuse report**

**Reporter: Alison Wright**

KERRY O'BRIEN: The report of the Gordon inquiry, released today in Perth, reveals a shocking incidence of child sex abuse and violence in Aboriginal communities in Western Australia.

And WA Premier Geoff Gallup claims it's not just a problem for his state.

He describes the situation as "a national disaster" and has called on the PM to take action.

The Gordon inquiry was triggered by the coronial inquest into the death of 15-year-old Susan Taylor in 1999, which was followed by allegations about endemic abuse of children in one particular Aboriginal community near Perth.

Before Alison Wright's report, a warning - it contains pictures of a person who has died, which may distress some Aboriginal viewers.

MICHELLE POLAND, FORMER CASE WORKER: This is a beautiful 15-year-old girl, pretty, long blonde hair, you know, she could have been anything.

She was intelligent.

She could have gone back to school.

She could have studied.

She could have even gone to university.

Susan shouldn't have died.

She should never have died.

ALISON WRIGHT: Michelle Poland is still haunted by the memory of Susan Taylor.

She was only 15 when she took her own life in 1999 at the Swan Valley Nyungah community on the outskirts of Perth.

Weeks before her death, Susan Taylor disclosed she had endured a life of sexual abuse.

Michelle Poland had been her mentor, or case worker, assigned by the WA Ministry of Justice in 1998.

MICHELLE POLAND: I still carry the scar and I always will carry the scar because there just isn't -- people that are -- just aren't doing the right thing by these kids.

You know, these kids are innocent.

They're children.

They've got rights, you know.

They've got rights to their own bodies.

They've got rights to say yes or no.

But this has all been taken away from -- from little kids.

ALISON WRIGHT: Susan Taylor's death focused unwanted attention on the Swan Valley Nyungah community.

Claims emerged that a culture of sexual abuse and solvent sniffing existed there.

One of Perth's best-known Aboriginal activists and elder Robert Bropho was quick to reject the allegations.

REPORTER: Is there a problem with sexual abuse in your community?

ROBERT BROPHO: No, there's none whatsoever, as I said there.

Not to my knowledge.

ALISON WRIGHT: When a coronial inquest was finally held into Susan Taylor's death, the court heard accusations that Robert Bropho gave young girls money and paint in exchange for sex.

ROBERT BROPHO: I've had everything flung at me, barring the kitchen sink.

The allegation has been made out of pure picking on our community.

ALISON WRIGHT: It was Michelle Poland and Ted Wilkes, the former head of the Aboriginal health service, who lobbied authorities to hold the coronial inquest.

TED WILKES, WA INSTITUTE OF CHILD HEALTH RESEARCH, 7:30 REPORT, 31 OCTOBER, 2001: It's been made to be a taboo and it's been made to be shameful because it's in the interest of anyone who is a perpetrator to actually keep the issue hidden.

ALISON WRIGHT: And it was the evidence that emerged at the inquest that led the Government to last year commission Magistrate Sue Gordon to examine government agency response to child sex abuse in Aboriginal communities.

MICHELLE POLAND: I mean, it's 2002.

These things shouldn't be happening, it should be stopped.

We've got departments.

We've got things out there.

We've got the power of the police.

We've got the power of government.

It should be stopped.

Something needs to be done.

ALISON WRIGHT: That something was announced today by the WA Premier, Geoff Gallop.

197 recommendations to deal with the problem so large -- he says it needs a national response.

GEOFF GALLOP, WA PREMIER: This is a national debate and we're sending it to the PM because obviously the Commonwealth Government has responsibilities in this area.

And we believe that they ought to know about the findings of our inquiry.

And there needs to be a national approach to this issue.

I mean, this is not just a Western Australian issue.

ALISON WRIGHT: The inquiry found Aboriginal children are seven times more likely to be abused than non-Aboriginal children.

It also found that the WA Office of Aboriginal Health didn't have any specific policies, procedures or agendas to address family violence and child abuse in Aboriginal communities.

It recommended a massive overhaul of health and welfare services that deal with child sex abuse as well as establishing a children's commissioner and a child death review team.

It also recommends new child protection legislation and there be mandatory reporting of children under the age of 13 with sexually transmitted diseases.

GEOFF GALLOP: There will be, without doubt, millions of dollars of implications of all of these recommendations and we as a government will have to work through that issue.

ALISON WRIGHT: A task force will now go through the recommendations and decide how to implement them.

Ted Wilkes today welcomed the report, but remains sceptical that the blueprint for addressing the problem will ever be fully implemented.

TED WILKES: If the human resource in all of this, if the human beings in this showed firepower and the will to move it, it could happen.

But, at this stage, I'm not too confident in what might happen in the short term.

ALISON WRIGHT: In specific reference to the Swan Valley Nyungah community, the report recommended there be negotiations with the community leaders to ensure welfare workers can get access to children.

The Premier says it will consider stripping the community of its current powers to operate independently.

GEOFF GALLOP: We're looking at that vesting.

We're looking at whether or not conditions should be placed on it or whether or not we'll remove that vesting.

ALISON WRIGHT: Today Mr Bropho declined to comment to the 7:30 Report.

But Ted Wilkes says the community should be on notice.

TED WILKES: If that means at the end of the day that people are fined or jailed or are asked to move on or stood down from particular positions, so be it.

ALISON WRIGHT: Michelle Poland says while the inquiry has pushed the issue out into the open, the report's recommendations come too late for Susan Taylor.

She hopes the recommendations can avert future tragedies.

MICHELLE POLAND: These people are human beings.

They deserve a chance.

They're not dogs on the street.

They deserve a chance to live like human beings.

KERRY O'BRIEN: The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission is expected to respond to those findings tomorrow.