

[Stop jailing kids under age 14: Don Dale judge](#)



Former royal commissioner Margaret White.

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Former royal commissioner Margaret White, who presided over an inquiry into the Don Dale saga, has called for an -urgent increase in the age of criminal responsibility applied to young people in all states and territories.

Ms White, a retired judge who sat on the Supreme Court of Queensland, served as co--commissioner alongside Mick Gooda during the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory.

The pair last night gave the 2018 Menzies Oration at the Menzies School of Health -Research in Darwin. According to an advance copy of her -remarks, Ms White spoke about research showing children's brains were not fully developed in their teenage years.

"No child under the age of 14 should be incarcerated except for the most serious crimes," Ms White said.

"The combination of natural brain immaturity in children and young adolescents, and the high likelihood that if they continue to offend after police cautions and warnings that they have had adverse childhood experiences which may have compromised their brain architecture, are compelling reasons to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 12 at a minimum."

She also called for Darwin's Don Dale Youth Detention Centre, where allegations of abuses in custody sparked the child -detention royal commission, to be "closed soon".

Ms White acknowledged there would be objections to her point of view, particularly concerning the security of property and risk of assaults, but said that was “not a good enough reason for failing to act”.

She said all Australian jurisdictions relied upon a minimum age of criminal responsibility of 10 years, whereas international norms showed that could reasonably be higher. “I would hope that places of detention would be small, therapeutic and welfare-driven, in the best meaning of that demonised word,” she said. “By every measure, the -returns would be significant.”

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<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/state-politics/stop-jailing-kids-under-age-14-don-dale-judge/news-story/fc5e9458c8b91cdd0b52c5db41a422aa>