AN alliance of indigenous organisations has called on governments to address the high rate of Aboriginal incarceration in the Northern Territory.

The peak body for five groups says the Productivity Commission’s recent report on Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage reveals a “national crisis”, with NT the worst jurisdiction in Australia for Aboriginal incarceration.

The report showed NT’s imprisonment rate is 4.5 times higher than the national average and 85 per cent of prisoners at June this year were Aboriginal.

“We’re not just locking up men. The number of women in our prisons has almost doubled in the last three years,” spokeswoman Priscilla Collins said.

Acting Minister for Correctional Services Robyn Lambley said the Government’s response was to focus on employment “to break the vicious cycle of repeat offending”.

“The Northern Government has an increased focus on prisoner learning, training and work programs,” she said.

“Our ‘Sentenced to a Job’ program is already providing many inmates with something they have never had before; paid employment and self-worth,” she said.

The paid prisoner employment program sees inmates earn award wages, paying tax, rent for their cells and contributing to a victims’ assistance fund.

“Through work, people are able to break away from the passive welfare system, a terrible problem which contributed to many inmates offending in the first place,” Ms Lambley said.

“If we release prisoners back into the community with skills and a better prospect of gaining paid work, they are much less likely to reoffend and end up back in the Northern Territory’s jail system.”

Ms Collins said the Productivity Commission report highlighted the “heavy social and economic impact” of incarceration.

“It takes loved ones away from their families for extended periods,” she said.

“Mandatory sentencing, the recriminalisation of alcoholism through Alcohol Protection Orders, tougher bail laws and tougher penalties for all kinds of offences, results in more people going to prison for short sentences, but these current laws fail to make our communities safe.”

Ms Collins said it was disturbing the NT Government is now introducing paperless arrests, which she said would see Aboriginal people held with-out charge in police custody.

“We urge governments to move away from a punitive, short fix to law-and-order issues, and instead focus on putting money into therapeutic programs and services that will help our communities grow stronger, and avoid the criminal justice system,” she said.

Jessica Brown

A CELEBRITY of the mountain biking world has spent the week tearing up Central Australia’s distinctive red-dirt trails.

International mountain bike trail guru Joey Klein, aka the ‘Trail Jedi’, administered the ultimate test to determine whether Alice Springs’ trails are of world-class standard.

“They’re exciting, they’re more than I hoped for,” he said. “I love the riding. I’m excited to come back when it’s a little bit cooler. It’s been a little bit tooasty. I do a lot of work in the desert in the States but usually I’m there during the cooler months.”

Mr Klein said he rode in the early morning to beat the heat. He attended a meeting of the Alice Springs Mountain Bike Action Group where he shared advice and knowledge of trail development, best practice, and land management.

Minister for Tourism Matt Conlan said Mr Klein’s visit would provide “invaluable word-of-mouth promotion” for the Red Centre.

“Joey is an absolute celebrity in the mountain bike world and is the premier trails expert in the mountain bike world,” he said.

Rangers kept busy

ALICE Springs rangers issued 23 notices last month while making their “river runs”. Rangers patrolling the Todd River banks for anti-social behaviour such as public drinking and camping found an increase in offences for November from previous months.

For both September and October, no infringement notices were issued.

From March to August this year, no alcoholic drinks were tipped out and no infringements for public drinking were issued.

However, last month 13 people were spoken to for public drinking and 22 people were spoken to in October.

The statistics were published in a report to council on Monday.

Spotlight on safety

ALICE Springs Town Council will undertake a safety audit of the lighting in Todd Mall.

The investigation was initiated to determine if there are dark spots in arcades and if there is an even spread of light.

The audit will be finished in February, and a report will be given to the council.

The project was revealed in the council committee meeting minutes on Monday night.