



REGISTRAR'S YEAR IN REVIEW

From the desk of the Registrar

This year marks the sixth year of operation in the four welfare reform communities of Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge.

Local Commissioner numbers have remained stable with the exception being the welcome addition of Local Commissioner Thomas Toikalkin to Aurukun. The Commissioners have demonstrated a commitment and resilience in their leadership toward positive change. Communities report being safer places to live where responsibility for behaviour is being returned to individuals rather than viewed as a community issue.

Staffing within the Cairns registry and each regional office has also remained stable. The retention rate experienced by the Commission can be attributed to recruiting practices which are not solely aimed at seeking the right skill set, but also the right cultural fit with a view to succession planning, and reflects in no small way the dedication displayed by all Commission employees in achieving the goals of welfare reform.

The Commission farewelled its long serving Executive Officer (Management), Alison Kollmorgen, who was integral to the Commission's financial management and operations. She departed to Brisbane to accompany her partner in his employment, and continues to play a role in welfare reform within the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs. Mitchell Holmes subsequently joined the Commission as Executive Officer (Management) and has made an immediate impact in his role.

The Commission has experienced a significant workload this financial year with regular conferencing in each of the four communities. A total of 3,392 notices within jurisdiction were received which resulted in 1,794 conferences held, 435 referrals to service providers and 13.98 percent of clients on case plans as at 30 June 2014. A total of 304 Conditional Income Management orders were issued throughout the same period.

Following an independent evaluation of the CYWR trial released in 2012, the Institute sought an increase to the maximum rate of income management from the existing 75 percent to 90 percent. The increase was subsequently legislated to take effect from January 2014. The introduction of 90 percent income management has given Commissioners an additional tool to encourage those members of the communities who show significant resistance to measures already placed upon them to comply with orders. Commissioners have adopted the increased level of income management and introduced it into their conferencing processes, whilst giving due consideration to the circumstances of each individual. The Commission will monitor the performance of those clients on the increased income management level to determine what outcomes are achieved.

Since the Commission's establishment in 2008 it has adopted a continuous improvement strategy in regard to its operations. As part of this strategy the Commission undertakes progressive reviews of its processes and policies to ensure that it provides a transparent, effective, efficient, healthy and safe working environment. A review of the forms used within the Commission and the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) database was conducted in late 2013 in order to comply with legislative changes and to streamline the Commission's method of operations. The Commission will continue to progressively review and identify areas for operational improvements into the future.

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During the latter half of 2013 the Commission continued its partnership with Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) to provide the Ending Family Violence (EFV) program to the CYWR communities. The Commission conducted the delivery of the EFV program utilising its own appropriately trained staff currently servicing the communities to deliver the curriculum. Eight programs were delivered within the four communities. Although attendance rates varied, the Commission considers the delivery of the program a success in that there was a notable increase in the number of attendees successfully completing the program.

At the direction of the Commissioner, the Commission has initiated an Education and Information Delivery Strategy in order to better educate service providers and government agencies on the purpose and operations of the Commission. The strategy includes providing agencies with an online tool for their employees to access a comprehensive induction before commencing work in a welfare reform community. This custom built tool will optimise the delivery of consistent and appropriate training. It is vital that both government and non-government employees have an understanding and appreciation of the Commission - what it does, and just as importantly, what it does not do. A presentation has been developed to provide onsite information sessions and has been tailored to suit partner agencies, other interested groups and community members.

In November 2013 the Queensland Parliamentary Health and Community Services Committee, chaired by the Honourable Trevor Ruthenberg MP, Member for Kallangur, visited Cairns, Aurukun and Mossman Gorge to witness firsthand the role the Commission plays in the communities, and in particular the work its Local Commissioners perform, and the conditions under which they perform it. The Parliamentary Committee then convened in Cairns to hear submissions in relation to the Commission.

Our Local Commissioners are regularly consulted by a wide variety of high profile people and groups including government Ministers and departmental directors, visiting dignitaries, local advisory groups and many other parties interested in the welfare reform initiatives. A number of visitors were welcomed to the Cairns Registry during the year. Most were parties involved in, or interested in, Indigenous welfare reform who shared their own experiences, and more importantly wished to take away the lessons learned by the Commission over the past six years. Visitors included: the Honourable Nigel Scullion, Senator for the Northern Territory and Minister for Indigenous Affairs; the Honourable Johan (John) Wessel Elferink Northern Territory Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Minister for Correctional Services, Minister for Children and Families and Minister for Public Employment; Mr Jeremy Moore, President of the Guardianship Board of South Australia; Mr Colin McDonald Q.C., Former Chairman of Royal Darwin Hospital Board and Top End Health Council; Mr Edward Fraser, Central Desert Regional Council and Board Member of the Central Australia Health Network; and Mr Kym Davies, Project Manager, Family Responsibilities Project, Department of Attorney General & Justice, Northern Territory Government.

His Excellency Mr Paul Madden CMG, British High Commissioner to Australia visited Hope Vale in August 2013 and enjoyed lunch with the Local Commissioners.



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In May 2014 His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia and Her Excellency Lady Cosgrove visited Mossman Gorge and met with Local Commissioners Karen Gibson, Loretta Spratt and Karen Shuan, as well as Local Coordinator Sandra Rye. The Governor-General displayed a genuine interest in welfare reform and the work of our Local Commissioners in restoring local authority.

The Commission values the strong working relationships that it has with partner agencies. There are many who support the work of the Commission and their ongoing professional assistance and collaboration is most welcome. I acknowledge the support provided by our tripartite partners in the Australian and Queensland Governments and the Institute. Without their valued advice and guidance the Commission would not have achieved the high level of recognition it has.

I continue to appreciate the respect that the Local Commissioners have shown me and the staff of the Commission. The registry staff have again worked tirelessly to ensure that the goals of the Commission and welfare reform are being met. They have unselfishly supported the good work that the Local Coordinators perform on a daily basis in communities. The Commission has been able to recruit and retain where necessary quality people who display a genuine passion towards ensuring that the lives of others are being made better. I thank them all for their support.

Deputy Commissioner Rod Curtin's continued enthusiasm for welfare reform has been appreciated, whilst Commissioner David Glasgow, as always, has led by example and I thank him for his leadership and encouragement. I look forward to ensuring that the good work of the Commission continues into the future.

Rob White

Registrar

