

COMMISSIONER GLASGOW'S MESSAGE



From the Commissioner

A report on the Commission's activities in the five Indigenous communities in which we now operate, together with a report on our financial operations over the past 12 months to 30 June, 2015 follows.

It is pleasing to note that the Commission operated well within budget and provides an operating surplus for the year. We are conscious, being entrusted with significant public monies in the administration of our statutory functions, to operate efficiently and cost effectively. Registrar and General Manager Maxine Mcleod and Commission Accountant Andrea Cotten have, since taking up their respective roles in January and February 2015, been the catalyst for significant administrative and operational change which has brought efficiencies in management, whilst fully maintaining our operational integrity. During this year the Commission commenced operations in the community of Doomadgee located on the Nicholson River in the far north western corner of Queensland, some 130 kilometres east of the Northern Territory border. The community's isolation has brought significant challenges.

Changing of the guard

The Commission was privileged to induct a total of 13 new Local Commissioners this financial year. Eight Local Commissioners now represent the community of Doomadgee: Councillor Elaine Cairns, Guy Elvis Douglas, David Jeffrey Gallagher, Karen Barbara Jupiter, Christopher John Logan, Kaylene Narelle O'Keefe, Isabel Jean Toby and Eleanor Ruth Logan. Coen welcomed two new Local Commissioners in Maureen Liddy and Alison Liddy, Hope Vale welcomed Local Commissioner Cheryl Cannon and Selina Bowen and Aurukun welcomed Local Commissioner Leona Yunkaporta.

2015 saw two Commissioners retire from the Commission for family reasons, Local Commissioner Thomas Toikalkin from Aurukun and Local Commissioner Hadley Gibson from Mossman Gorge. I extend to each of them my personal thanks and that of their communities for their unselfish efforts during their time with us.

The Commission's activities in each of the five communities over the past year are detailed in this annual report. Though there have been a number of specific issues in Aurukun which have resulted in a reduction in the number of satisfactory outcomes, progress has been made in each community.

Our Local Commissioners are determined to be part of, and catalysts for, continuing improvements in their respective communities. They are a formidable band of women and men who deserve our admiration and support.

Fourteen Commissioners, who have been with the Commission since it commenced on 1 July, 2008 were honoured by their fellow Australians for their services to the Indigenous communities in the 2015 Australia Day Awards and awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia. His Excellency the Honourable Paul de Jersey AC Governor of Queensland presented the Medals to the Commissioners in Cairns on May 27 in the presence of their colleagues, families and friends.

Also in May this year the Commission published a brief history of each of the Local Commissioners. Its author, Gordon Dean, interviewed the Commissioners and, in their words, recorded information in regard to their families and their personal histories, to let others know what shaped their lives and eventually brought them to the Commission. Entitled 'The Fire Within' the publication also records the details of some individuals who are and were responsible for the successes of the Family Responsibilities Commission (FRC).



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Commission staff

December 2014 saw our seconded Registrar, Robert White, return to the Department of Justice and Attorney-General, and in February our Executive Officer (Management), Mitchell Holmes, departed from the Commission. A restructure of the Commission was undertaken which resulted in increased efficiencies both in administration and operations in the field. I thank Rob White and Mitchell Holmes for their commitment to maintaining the high service objectives of the Commission and wish them well with their future careers.

I acknowledge the remarkable management and organisational skills Registrar Maxine McLeod has shown since taking up the role in January. Both she and our Accountant, Andrea Cotten, have presided over and successfully implemented our restructure with significant and quantifiable improvements to all areas of the Commission's operations.

I also acknowledge the dedication and efficiency of all our staff, many of whom operate under difficult conditions in the five communities. The Commission could not function in these communities without their total and focused commitment.

Deputy Commissioner Curtin undertook the responsibilities of the Doomadgee circuit from January 2015 and has conferenced in that community fortnightly to good effect. I thank him for his valued work which has involved considerable travel.

Services in communities

The commitment of our Commissioners, Mayors and members of Councils, teachers, health professionals, police officers and the staff of many service providers to forging improvements in the lives of the children and residents of the welfare reform communities has been outstanding and I commend their efforts.

In particular the Commission acknowledges the outstanding commitment to the Aurukun people of Senior Sergeant Brenden McMahon whose four years of service to this community ended in December 2014.

The Commission's future

The Honourable Minister Glen Elmes MP Minister for the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs (DATSIMA) advised the Commissioner that the FRC would become a permanent structure in Queensland, and on 5 August 2014 introduced legislation into State Parliament removing the sunset clause from the *Family Responsibilities Commission Act 2008* (the Act). The Bill was passed with bipartisan support on 14 October 2014 and the Act proclaimed on 28 November 2014. Aside from paving the way for Doomadgee (and potential future communities) to be an area prescribed by regulation as a welfare reform community area, and removing the sunset clause, the amendments provided for additional court triggers from the Supreme, District and Children's Courts. The Commission views the additional court triggers as a strengthening of its ability to work positively with a broader range of the community. The amended definition of a welfare reform community area will enable communities to exit welfare reform or join welfare reform without requiring amendments to the Act.

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On 27 November 2014, on advice of the Executive Council the following appointments were announced: myself as the FRC Commissioner, Rodney Curtin as Deputy Commissioner and 29 Local Commissioners for the communities of Aurukun, Coen, Doomadgee, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge. The appointments were set for a term of 3 years commencing 1 January 2015 and published in the Queensland Government Gazette.

On 14 May 2015 His Excellency the Governor, acting on advice of the Executive Council, approved the appointment of four new Local Commissioners, each of whom hold their office until 1 January 2018.

The Commission awaits delivery of the Queensland Government budget by The Honourable Curtis Pitt MP, Treasurer and Minister for the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DATSIP) on 14 July 2015.

The Commission is confident it can deliver the objectives it is charged to achieve within the principles of our Act, and operate effectively within such expanded areas as requested by Indigenous communities and the Queensland and Australian Governments.

David Glasgow, AM
Family Responsibilities Commissioner



Local Commissioners from Aurukun, Coen, Doomadgee, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge with Commissioner Glasgow, Deputy Commissioner Curtin at the Local Commissioner Development Week May 2015