



# LOCAL COMMISSIONER DEVELOPMENT WEEK

The week beginning 25 May 2015 saw the commencement of the Commission's Local Commissioner Development Week. The Development Week is an annual event where the Local Commissioners travel from their respective communities to convene in Cairns for a program of training, information sessions and networking activities. The agenda for the week is nominated and approved by the Commissioners and includes events and activities such as

- specific training in areas identified and requested by the Local Commissioners
- meeting with senior officers of government departments and agencies who provide service delivery in their communities
- updates on Commission procedures and processes
- presentations from service providers and stakeholders and
- participation in workshops to address common issues, review strategies and source solutions.

As some Commissioners were still en route on Monday morning, the 2015 Development Week commenced with the Commissioners separating into groups to visit a selection of sites based on nominated preferences. Options included Djarragun and Peace Lutheran Colleges, Red Cross, the Quigley Street Night Shelter and the premises of Youth Empowered Towards Independence. Aurukun Commissioners remained at the conference venue for community specific discussions on the Alcohol Management Plan and proposed Jail to Jobs program.

The official opening of the Development Week was conducted in the afternoon of the first day and included a traditional welcome by Henrietta Marrie. Henrietta Marrie was born and raised in Yarrabah, Queensland. Amongst her many achievements, Henrietta has a Diploma in Teaching and a Graduate Diploma of Arts (Indigenous Studies). Additionally she undertook a Masters in Environmental and Local Government Law (through Macquarie University). Henrietta was the first Aboriginal Australian to be appointed to a full-time position in a United Nations agency.

Following the traditional welcome, Amy Barden, the Commission's Client Manager, outlined the agenda for the week and thanked the Commissioners for their guidance in developing an effective week with relevant learnings. Commissioner Glasgow then addressed the gathering, welcoming the Local Commissioners and thanking them for their hard work and dedication throughout the year. Commissioner Glasgow acknowledged the need for new challenges and opportunities moving into the future, and committed to pursuing further amendments to the FRC Act to allow Local Commissioners to expand their decision-making powers in conference. Local Commissioners were encouraged to question presenters throughout the week, and to make suggestions and provide feedback.

Deputy Commissioner Rod Curtin introduced and presented a brief profile on each of the new Doomadgee Local Commissioners to the conference delegates. Registrar Maxine McLeod followed introducing all present to the Cairns Registry staff and outlining their roles within the Commission. Following this introduction Maxine advised on the appointments of new Local Commissioners for the communities of Aurukun, Coen and Hope Vale.

The afternoon of the first day continued with the launch of author Gordon Dean's second book on the Commission, 'The Fire Within'. 'The



*Local Commissioners Shuan and Kepple, Mr Gordon Dean,  
Local Commissioners Kerindun and Deeral*

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'Fire Within' tells the stories and histories of those people without whom the FRC could not exist – the Local Commissioners. The book records and preserves their accounts, their concerns, their fears and hopes for a better future. It gives an insight into the lives of those who worked (and continue to work) so hard to build a better future and ensures their recollections will not be forgotten.

A 'round table' forum prior to the evening meal provided the Local Commissioners with an opportunity to debrief on the events of the day and engage in active discussion on a variety of subjects including the problems of alcohol, drugs and unemployment in the communities, high student absentee rates due to funerals and bullying. The Commissioners were able to share their experiences and knowledge on strategies in dealing with client responses to CIM orders with the Doomadgee Local Commissioners who are yet to be able to income manage clients.

A visit to the Lotus Glen Correctional Centre and farm gave Local Commissioners the chance to view the training, industry and farm work opportunities offered to prisoners. Seventy percent of Lotus Glen's prisoner population is comprised of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, a number of whom are from the FRC welfare reform communities. Aurukun Commissioners were particularly interested in training provided in the prison that would aid released prisoners in their transition back into community.

The next day representatives from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet attended the conference to present to the Local Commissioners a detailed seminar on the Work for the Dole program. The program was initially rolled out to select communities in 2014 and will move to a full national scheme from 1 July 2015. Work for the Dole will enable job seekers between 18 and 50 years to learn skills that will enable them to remain actively engaged in their local communities while they seek employment. Centrelink Remote Services Team members also conducted a question and answer session with a particular focus on ABSTUDY. The presenters outlined the terms of financial assistance available to parents of community children who need to travel to boarding school to continue their education from Year 7 onwards.

Outcomes from the Carmody Inquiry into Child Protection were presented to the Commissioners by officers from the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services. Of the 121 recommendations the government accepted 115 outright and gave in-principle support to the remaining six. Key outcomes included a new child safety framework (Family and Child Connect) to commence rollout from January 2016, diverting families from the child protection system and addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The report praised the workings of the FRC with a suggestion for the model to be implemented in other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Wednesday afternoon saw Commissioner Glasgow and his fellow Local Commissioners formally presented with their Order of Australia awards at an Australian Honours and Awards Investiture Ceremony conducted by His Excellency the Honourable Paul de Jersey AC Governor of Queensland. Invited guests shared a celebratory afternoon tea after the ceremony.

On the last day of the conference a comprehensive seminar on Resilience, compiled by Psychologist David Cherry, was facilitated by a colleague Psychologist Kate Skilbeck. The seminar covered topics such as irrational concerns, dealing with aggressive individuals, strategies for building resilience, and self-care. The workshops were customised to be particularly relevant to the often difficult situation the Local Commissioners face when working as leaders of change whilst living in their communities.

Since 2009, the annual Commissioner Development Week has proven to be an invaluable tool in building on Local Commissioner relationships, knowledge and skills, and a sound investment in the people who carry out the work of the Commission in community.