

COMMISSIONER GLASGOW'S MESSAGE



From the Commissioner

Our report outlines the activities of the Commission in the financial year to June 30, 2017 following nine years of operation, and I am pleased to once again report that we have delivered a modest operational surplus.

The Commission conferenced in all five communities, with the majority of conferences in the four welfare reform communities of Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge being conducted independently by Local Commissioners. I have satisfaction in reporting that in doing so my colleagues have received widespread community acceptance.

The Commission has continued our priorities of concentrating on the care and safety of children, improving school attendance, and supporting Local Commissioners to independently manage their conferences.

Commission staff

Our office in Cairns has functioned well over the past year, ably led by Maxine McLeod who has been active in visiting each community and responding to the needs of each.

This year we were indeed fortunate to obtain the services of Tracey Paterson. Tracey joined us as Finance Manager after the departure of Andrea Cotton who left us to continue her travels overseas.

Whilst our Client Manager has been on extended maternity leave, her role has been ably filled internally by Anne Crampton who has proved well up to the task.

I acknowledge the proven leadership and skills of our small Executive Management Team (EMT) who have again secured an operating surplus whilst functioning on our fixed budget.

The remarkable strength of the Commission's work in the communities could not have been achieved without the dedication of our Local Coordinators who live and work there. Each provides inspiration not only for our Commissioners, but also regularly attend to tasks outside their position descriptions and assist community members to resolve individual problems.

Deputy Commissioner Curtin continues the responsibilities of the Doomadgee circuit. I thank the Commissioner and our colleagues for the good work they are doing, and note that they will commence conferencing independently within the next few months.

Concerns – Child Safety and Youth Justice

Last year I reported to Government the significant and as then unexplained reduction in the receipt of Child Safety and Welfare notices in the communities of Aurukun and Hope Vale.

The *Speak Up, Be Strong, Be Heard* initiative of the Queensland Police Service (QPS) is having a real impact in encouraging local people to be comfortable in voicing and reporting their concerns within the Aurukun and Hope Vale communities.

As I reported last year, we no longer receive Childrens Court notices as a consequence of a change in Government policy. This potentially valuable area of family conferencing within the Commission no longer exists, but we continue to work with families where we can, though meeting with young offenders no longer occurs.



COMMISSIONER GLASGOW'S MESSAGE

Education of children

I record the gratitude of the Commission and our Commissioners to Noel Pearson, the architect of the Commission, for his vision and total commitment to improving the lives of all Indigenous children.

His address in January to the people of Aurukun in the company of Mayor Dereck Walpo and Patrea Walton, Deputy Director-General State Schools of the Department of Education and Training (DET), brought to the attention of that community not only the need for the education of their own children, but also the imperative to educate all Indigenous Australian children. That address is in part recorded in the Hope Vale Commissioners' year in review.

Noel reminded us that it is a challenge to all Australians to ensure each child in our country receives the advantages of a good and complete education. Without education our children will be unable to fully participate in the wider community, honouring their culture and their families by living a full, healthy and meaningful life.

To this end, Commissioners work cooperatively with the school Principals, parents and carers, School Attendance Officers and community members in each of the five communities to assist in lifting attendance levels and endeavouring to ensure their children receive the education to which they are entitled.

Acknowledgements

In the past year five Commissioners have retired due to work and/or family commitments. I thank them all for their service to their communities and Queensland. Sarah Wolmby OAM and Brian Cobus OAM joined me when the Commission first commenced on July 1, 2008. Both were awarded the Order of Australia for their services and I particularly wish to record the thanks of their communities and the Commission for their dedicated service.

Earlier in 2017 a new Minister, the Honourable Mark Furner, was appointed with responsibility for Local Government and the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DATSIP). Director-General, Ms Clare O'Connor, continues in her role. I acknowledge her leadership and commitment to the improvement of the lives of Indigenous people in Queensland.

The community of Aurukun is recovering well from the disturbances of 2015. Community members and Elders deserve recognition for the mature way in which they have handled complex inter-clan relationships over the past 18 months. The involvement of Elders in that community and their willingness to take positive leadership has been an inspiration to observe.

The Commission and the Aurukun Commissioners acknowledge the involvement of Brendon McMahon, the Queensland Government Senior Coordinator in Aurukun, in these processes. His presence and contribution have resulted in a community devoid of major disturbances, and a place where people are going about their lives with purpose. His persistence in implementing the Premier's Four Point Plan for Aurukun has seen commitment from the State Government and non-Government organisations to work collaboratively and effectively. The Australian Government has also worked closely with Brendon to ensure their services are similarly working effectively and collaboratively. I am observing significant measurable results with less duplication, and more hands-on participation and acceptance of responsibility for service delivery. He reports directly to the Director-General of DATSIP, Ms Clare O'Connor.

COMMISSIONER GLASGOW'S MESSAGE



The future

As we commence our tenth year serving the welfare reform communities, I am reminded that the Family Responsibilities Bill 2008, introduced into the Queensland Parliament on 26 February 2008 by the then Premier the Honourable Anna Bligh, was passed with bi-partisan support on 13 March 2008 and signed into law by the Governor of Queensland on that day.

In introducing the Bill to Parliament Premier Anna Bligh said,

“This is a ground-breaking trial, unique in the world. It will be a significant departure from the policies that have been tried in the past. The bill establishes the Family Responsibilities Commission as the driving force in changing local social norms and behaviour. It will directly link improved care for children to welfare and other government payments.”

Our Act then had a sunset clause which had the Commission concluding operations on 31 December 2011. Successive Governments have extended the operation of the Commission. A closing date was finally removed by the Campbell Newman led Government in 2014.

The Commission awaits with interest the outcome of the review currently being undertaken by the State and Australian Governments which is considering a transition of the welfare reform communities of Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge to the next stage. Local consultations will continue later in 2017.

David Glasgow AM
Family Responsibilities Commissioner



Local Commissioners from Aurukun, Coen, Doomadgee, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge with Commissioner Glasgow, Deputy Commissioner Curtin and Noel Pearson at the Local Commissioner Development Week May 2017