



LOCAL COMMISSIONER DEVELOPMENT WEEK

The month of May features as a highlight in the calendar of Commission operations, as the Local Commissioners travel to Cairns from each of the communities to come together for a week of training and development. The week is an important annual event which serves as not only an opportunity for learning, sharing and team building, but as a small reward for the Commissioners hard work in often difficult circumstances. Agenda items include updates on Commission processes and procedures, information sessions and presentations by expert professionals on particular issues of interest and relevance to the communities, as identified by the Commissioners.

Following the transition of the responsibility of the Wellbeing Centres from RFDS to Apunipima, Commissioners Maureen Liddy from Coen and Doreen Hart from Hope Vale, in their capacity as Apunipima employees, presented to the other Local Commissioners an update and information session on the transition and future plans. Commissioner Liddy spoke of the future focus of services for the community of Coen, and plans for the training and professional development of local staff, particularly in the fields of counselling, suicide prevention and mental health first aid. Commissioner Hart explained the traditional name of the Wellbeing Centre, 'Wawu Dabaar Bayan', telling of its translation as "the good soul house", and expressing her hopes to break down barriers and work towards removing the stigma around community perception of the Wellbeing Centre. Both Commissioners spoke of the aim to take the services out into the community, and to work with community members to source programs that community members see as beneficial.

An important feature of the Development Week each year is the 'Round Table' workshop. The 'Round Table' session provides the Commissioners with the rare and valuable opportunity to collectively discuss matters of significance from throughout the year. The Commissioners use this time to share concerns, reach solutions and plan strategies for the year ahead. Major issues discussed this year included the difficulty caused to Commission operations from the changed reporting of school attendance notices by DET. Inconsistencies in the recording of codes for school absences, the need for additional support in schools for children with behavioural and mental health problems, and support for teachers in managing these behaviours were also discussed.

Deputy Commissioner Curtin introduced guest speaker His Honour Judge Harrison from the District Court of Queensland who talked about the sentencing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and told stories of his experiences throughout his career. Judge Harrison outlined a number of studies done in relation to the overrepresentation and disadvantage of Indigenous people in the judicial system and explained to the Commissioners some of the guidelines that were used in sentencing Aboriginal offenders. The Judge explained the plea bargaining process and advised of the consideration taken into reports provided by community organisations such as Justice Groups. Commissioners and Local Coordinators took the opportunity of a Q & A session to seek information on topics such as exclusion from community as a condition of parole, and the rehabilitation of prisoners on their return.

Judge Harrison's presentation was fittingly followed by an information session presented by a team from Lotus Glen Correctional Centre and Probation and Parole. Michael Macfarlane, the General Manager of the prison, along with Ann Nicholls (Manager Offender Development) and two officers from Probation and

Parole gave an overview of the prison recounting its history, the 2009-2012 redevelopment of the facility, staffing structure, classifications and the diversity of the prisoners accommodated there, including youth



His Honour Judge Harrison

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and transgender prisoners. The range of services, activities, programs, cultural events and educational opportunities available to prisoners were described.

Melissa Browne from Cape York Partnership (CYP) gave the Commissioners a comprehensive overview of the Cape York Leaders Program, an initiative offering education, training, access to mentors and practical experience to support the growth of academic and leadership skills in students through to adults.

Tuesday evening's dinner gathering provided the opportunity for author Gordon Dean to launch the second edition of his book, 'The Fire Within', documenting the life stories of the 'backbone of the FRC', the Local Commissioners. The second release of the book was considered necessary in order to include the full accounts of the Doomadgee Commissioners who were appointed shortly before the publication of the first edition.

The Commission remains aware of the difficulties faced by Commissioners living and working in remote communities, often with limited opportunity for recreational activities and respite. In recognition of the nine years of service of many of the Commissioners and as a reward for the efforts of all the Commissioners in recent years, a trip to a conservation and nature reserve with a focus on sustainability and economic development was organised for Wednesday. The Commissioners enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to spend time consolidating relationships in an open and relaxed environment.

Updates on topics such as the current state of affairs in Aurukun, the status of drug use in Cape communities, Wangetti Girl Academy and the Empowered Communities initiative were presented by Brendon McMahon, the Senior Government Coordinator for Aurukun, Detective Senior Sergeant Kev Goan from the Queensland Police Service, Leanne Fox, Principal of Wangetti Girl Academy and Doreen Hart and Renee Williams from Cape York Partnership.



The Commission continues to commit to providing Commissioners with the best tools and skills to cope with any potential situation that may be encountered by Commissioners in the course of their duties. Training over past years has included resilience and self-care, and mental health first aid. This year David Bradford from Brisbane based DaVange Training facilitated a workshop on 'Managing Aggressive Behaviour and Personal Safety'.

David focused on strategies to help the Commissioners to build positive relationships with clients based on cooperation and not conflict.

Noel Pearson, Founder of Cape York Partnership, placed the focus firmly on the future in an address to the Commissioners on Friday morning. Whilst acknowledging the past good work and gains made by the FRC, Noel expressed his view that it was time to plan for the 'new look' Commission, a model that should include the FRC as a permanent entity, with the possibility of stronger collaboration with the Justice Groups in each community. Noel noted the numbers of Aboriginal children in care, elder abuse and community members living rough in Cairns as significant issues that could potentially be addressed by a new look FRC.

As in previous years the Commission's annual Development Week concluded with Local Commissioners collectively and individually empowered, with a renewed sense of energy and a strengthened resolve to continue to work towards positive outcomes in the welfare reform communities.