



# LOCAL COMMISSIONERS' YEAR IN REVIEW

## Aurukun Local Commissioners' report

We have now been Commissioners for a period of nine years and have been conferencing as a team of three Local Commissioners without Commissioner being present on numerous occasions for some time now. Four of us have now had another year as Councillors on the Aurukun Shire Council with Commissioner Kerindun as Deputy Mayor. We continue to learn and work hard in the interest of our Aurukun community. If you look around the community you will see it has new infrastructure and is moving ahead in a positive way. Commissioners Woolla and Koomeeta travelled to Hawaii in March 2017 to attend a Linguist/Art conference.

In May 2016 Brendon McMahon was seconded from the Queensland Police Service and appointed as the Queensland Government Senior Coordinator to Aurukun. He reports directly to the Director-General of DATSIP, Ms Clare O'Connor. His appointment last financial year was welcomed by all of our community. We regard him as a man of his word who understands how our community works and has knowledge of our ways and traditions. He knows, as we all do, that the Government and non-Government agencies are at times ineffectual and casual in carrying out their responsibilities. Brendon is providing the leadership and coordination of services required in Aurukun which we have not seen for many years. He has introduced a cooperative and responsible approach which requires that all agencies hold regular, purposeful meetings in a concerted effort to ensure funded bodies are meeting their benchmarks. We see that there is an ongoing need to employ the right people in government positions to ensure that the community's needs come first and are met.

Parents and carers of children here have worked hard to ensure that the problems in the community which caused the closure of the school and the disruption of our children's education did not follow into the new 2017 school year. We thank our Mayor, Dereck Walpo, Noel Pearson, Founder, Cape York Partnership and Patrea Walton, Deputy Director-General of the Department of Education and Training for their addresses to our public meeting on 17 January 2017. They reminded us that the first priority of all Indigenous Australians is the education of our children so they can each take their proper and rightful place in the world and not continue to fall behind.

In term 1 of the school year we saw the Aurukun State School change over from the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy back to the Department of Education and Training. Mike Ennis, the new Principal, was appointed along with a second Deputy Principal at the commencement of 2017. A grant of \$500,000 has been provided by the Australian Government to the Queensland State Government to engage ten School Attendance Officers (local residents) to assist in encouraging students to attend school. Additionally the Australian Government has funded the purchase of two new school buses to help in transporting students from around town to school. A behavioural management teacher has also been appointed. Notwithstanding all these new initiatives, school attendance in 2017 has increased only slightly in term one. Aurukun has a long way to go to reach our goal of 80 percent attendance each and every school day.

On 1 April 2017 we saw community consultations and the changeover of the Wellbeing Centre from the Royal Flying Doctor Service to Apunipima Cape York Health Council (Apunipima). We hope to see actual engagement with clients and our community. Consultation with, and involvement in our community will be essential for Apunipima to succeed in giving our community the assistance our people need.

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Government Champion, Michael Schaumburg, Director-General of the Department of State Development has held two roundtables during the past year. Community senior leaders met with the Champion to discuss concerns on behalf of the community and action resolutions with his support. Developments such as the refurbishment of the old hall to house the Police-Citizens Youth Club (PCYC), a splash park being incorporated into the community's swimming pool and the Three Rivers Tavern becoming a community centre were discussed, along with ongoing concerns in regard to housing and overcrowding, policing and schooling.

Our Women's Coordinator was appointed in June. Priscilla Blanco's appointment is an opportunity to bring the women of the five clans within our community together, for whilst some things may at times divide us, we have much in common.

The Aurukun Justice Reintegration Project has commenced with four staff: one located at Lotus Glen, one located at Probation and Parole in Weipa, and a Senior Project Officer and Senior Support Officer located in Aurukun. Meetings are held on a weekly basis to discuss offenders who are due to be released from custody. Local stakeholders who are able to mentor offenders are nominated to engage with the released person on their return to community. The purpose of this mentoring is to assist them in engaging with Centrelink and employment agencies, and to provide any assistance they may require in obtaining medical aid or counselling to 'help them keep on track'.

The Restorative Justice Program (mediation program) had a change of coordinators and the program has been working well with the courts and the feuding groups in community. Our congratulations go to Trevor Adcock and Keri Tamwoy for their continuing efforts to mediate disputes which arise from time to time.

The PCYC is now occupying their new building after works were completed in late 2016. PCYC have been running sporting activities and attending the school to run sessions with the students. After school activities are held for the children and the centre is open to adults who wish to use the facilities from 5pm.

The Aurukun Shire Council has made a number of houses available to community members and there are currently more houses being built. This will assist with the residential overcrowding in our community.

**Aurukun Local Commissioners Edgar Kerindun, Doris Poonkamelya, Ada Woolla, Dorothy Pootchemunka and Vera Koomeeta.**

