



# LOCAL COMMISSIONERS' YEAR IN REVIEW

## Hope Vale Local Commissioners' report

The past year has seen our Hope Vale community take further steps to “*make a change and take control of their community*” (2015-2016 Annual Report – Hope Vale Local Commissioners' report) by stepping up to tackle some of the more disturbing trends. These trends included a resurgence in youth crime - breaking into homes and defacing public buildings with graffiti. A large number of secondary school aged students also became completely disengaged from the education system. We were reminded of the need for all of our children to complete their education by Noel Pearson in his address to the people of Aurukun in January this year when he said:

*“Our people have already lived for more than 53,000 years in this Cape York. Fifty-three thousand years, and Europeans have only been in Australia for little more than 200.*

*People in Cape York were the first people to come to Australia. Back when we first arrived there was land between Cape York and New Guinea, and our ancient ancestors walked across the Torres Strait on dry land. That's how long we have been here, and yet 200 years later look at our people.*

*We live short lives; we live in great inequality; our health is no good; our education is very poor. There's too many of our people in jail. There's too many of our young people in detention, and there's too many babies taken away from their parents.*

*That's only 200 years out of 53,000. What about in 100 years' time? Will our people still be alive? Will our culture, will our language be still alive in 200 years' time?*

*That is the question we need to ask ourselves.*

*Where will the Wik people be in 200 years' time? We've got to find the answer to that question. We have lived for 53,000 years and what - we're going to all lose it in a couple of hundred?*

*We can't let that happen. We've got to get strong. We've got to keep our language and culture strong, and keep our land strong. How can we lose everything in just a few hundred years of white fellas coming here when our people prospered for 53,000 years?*

*So why education? Education is going to make us strong. It's going to make our little ones strong. It's going to make our little ones become Elders; like the Elders you used to have; like the Elders I worked with as a young man.*

*So I'm not here for the government. I'm not here for the council. I'm not here for my own organisation. I'm here for your children. I want to support the Mayor in his message:*

*'Bring your children and grandchildren to school because that is the only way to make the Wik people strong, and you will live for hundreds of years into the future if you do that.'*

*They are the only ones who can keep the Wik people and the Wik culture alive many, many years into the future.*

*Our plan has got to be as Bama, as Bama from Cape York. Our plan has got to be: 'we have lived for 53,000 years. We are going to live for 53,000 more'.*

*We have got to get healthy; we have got to get educated; and support our children because they are the future. I want to really echo what the Mayor said, send your children to school every day. Please. They are your future.”*

*\* Extract from Noel Pearson's speech to the members of the Wik Community Aurukun January 17, 2017 in the presence of Mayor Dereck Walpo and Patrea Walton, Deputy Director -General Department of Education and Training*

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We in Hope Vale can be very proud of our primary school and the attendance of our children, though attendance on Fridays continues to be a real disappointment as many parents leave the community with their children after work finishes at 12 noon. We plead with the parents to consider what Noel has said about our children's futures, and keep them at school on Fridays and every other school day.

The move last year of Cape York Partnership Parenting teams into the school has seen many improvements in behaviour and the concentration of kids whilst in class. We have also seen a number of fathers taking a greater interest in their children by giving better support to their partners.

We have seen new school and community partnerships and a continuing interest by Mayor Greg McLean and his Councillors in the activities of our school.

We continue to be concerned with those children of Year 7 and older who are not engaged with the high school or Holy Spirit College in Cooktown. There is, in our view, no reason for our young people not to be involved in either mainstream schooling, or the new flexible and positive alternative education programs delivered at Holy Spirit College. A number of carers and parents complain to us that they have little direct control over their disengaged children who cannot see, or be encouraged to see, the advantage of a complete education. Our real worry is that these young people will not have the basic knowledge or skills to actively engage in the workforce. Without a good education they will not be able to cope with the complexity of community life as adults, and may well fall by the wayside.

In the past year we have noticed a neater and cleaner community, with more housing completed and welcoming and pleasant places to live and work. Much credit for this should go to the Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council and its workforce, but also the community generally for taking more pride in our place.

We saw the retirement of longstanding Hope Vale Commissioners Brian Cobus and Ivan Deemal whose individual workloads and commitments to family have prevented them from sitting in conference. Their retirement has brought about vacancies and steps are underway to fill these positions with young persons from Hope Vale. Following an approval process, appointment of Local Commissioners is then made under section 12 of the *Family Responsibilities Commission Act 2008* by the Governor in Council. We wish each of our colleagues well and thank them for their commitment and service to the Commission.

Our Local Coordinator, Samantha Foster (Sam), left the Commission in January. Matthew Thompson, who is known to us all from his time in Hope Vale as a School Attendance Officer, has taken over and we welcome him and his partner Naomi who has joined the teaching staff at our school. They have taken up residence in our community and we are happy to see their return.

We continue our work as Local Commissioners, offering advice and assistance to our fellow community members where we can. This year we have continued to convene and chair many of our own conferences, referring to Commissioner Glasgow on matters of law. His advice to us is that we are fully capable of attending to all matters which come before the Commission in our own right, as Local Commissioners and as members of the Hope Vale Community.

**Hope Vale Commissioners Victor Gibson, Doreen Hart, Erica Deeral, Cheryl Cannon and Selina Bowen.**