



# STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

## Our vision

Vibrant welfare reform communities that are responsible, healthy, safe and sustainable.

## Our purpose

Supporting welfare reform community members to restore socially responsible standards of behaviour, local authority and wellbeing for themselves and their families.

## Our values

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| <b>Safety:</b>      | We value the right of everyone to live in safe communities.  |
| <b>Respect:</b>     | We believe that respect for oneself builds the foundation for wellbeing.   |
| <b>Ownership:</b>   | We are committed to encouraging communities to take ownership of their present and future.   |
| <b>Innovation:</b>  | We actively seek and encourage creative ideas to build the potential for lasting change.   |
| <b>Empowerment:</b> | We are committed to empowering people to take the initiative to reform their communities and build their own direction and future. |
| <b>Diversity:</b>   | We are passionate about respecting the diversity and cultural richness of the communities.   |

## Strategic outcomes

- Improved community wellbeing
- Improved community responsibility
- Improved organisational capability.

## Strategic objectives

- Support the restoration of socially responsible standards of behaviour and local authority in welfare reform communities
- Help people in welfare reform communities to resume primary responsibility for the wellbeing of their communities and the individuals and families of their communities
- Create a capable, agile and innovative organisation
- Know our clients, communities and build partnerships.

## Service Charter Statement

The Family Responsibilities Commission knows that you value good customer service. Our aim is to give you the best service we can. We will work with clients and stakeholders to deliver outputs for the State and Australian Governments that achieve the outcomes sought for the welfare reform communities. In doing so, we will nurture a spirit of inquiry and innovation, and will embrace the challenge of sourcing unconventional and creative solutions to address the complex problems that confront our communities.



## The creation of the Family Responsibilities Commission

In early 2006 the Australian Government agreed to fund the development phase of the Cape York Welfare Reform (CYWR) trial proposed by the Cape York Institute (the Institute). The Queensland Government also agreed to participate in the development and provided in-kind support and assistance throughout the development period.

The Institute subsequently released a design report titled “From Hand Out To Hand Up” in May 2007 and a final report with the same title in November 2007. The report outlined the Institute’s proposal for the CYWR trial to be implemented in the communities of Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge. The objectives of the CYWR trial were to restore social norms and local Indigenous authority. The trial aimed to initiate and support a positive change in social norms and community behaviours in response to chronic levels of passive welfare, social dysfunction and economic exclusion within these communities.

In December 2007, the Queensland Government agreed to contribute \$40 million and the Australian Government \$48 million to finance the implementation of the CYWR trial over four years.

The broad objectives of the welfare reform agenda are to:

- rebuild social norms and restore Indigenous authority
- address the welfare pedestal through changing incentives
- support engagement in the real economy
- move from welfare housing to home ownership
- enable children to make full use of their talents and creativity and to enjoy the best of both worlds.

The reforms are designed with a strong emphasis on partnership, capacity building, respect and use of local authority. Emphasis is also placed on the enhancement of services and appropriate service delivery mechanisms. A range of policy, program and service delivery reforms and practical on-the-ground initiatives have been implemented to help reduce welfare dependency, promote social responsibility, provide pathways to participation in the real economy, improve school attendance and enhance educational opportunities.

These include:

- effective responses to alcohol and drug misuse, gambling, addictive behaviours and violence
- improved services to promote child, individual and family wellbeing including support services which assist expectant parents, encourage positive behaviour, optimise learning by improving school attendance, prepare students for secondary school and assist in maximising the transition to boarding school
- interventions which target employment assistance, sponsor individual enterprise, increase educational opportunities and encourage private home ownership
- increased investment in community capacity building through social capital building programs and Opportunity Hubs that provide a central location for products to assist the community, social and civic activities as well as service co-location
- money management services to promote financial literacy and capability, build assets and establish educational savings trusts to enable the continuing education of children and
- income management of individuals where appropriate to assist them to manage their finances and in some instances to encourage compliance with case plans aimed at improving social responsibility.



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The reforms are designed to initiate early intervention in order to address issues and behaviours before they escalate. A key feature of the CYWR trial was the creation of the Family Responsibilities Commission as an independent statutory authority. The Commission is regarded as a critical mechanism to facilitate the rebuilding of intra-community social norms and to encourage behavioural change through attaching reciprocity and communal obligations to welfare and other government payments. The intention of the reforms and of this Commission is to enhance and complement the existing responsibilities of Queensland and Australian Government agencies, service delivery and community organisations.

This philosophy is grounded in the Institute's view that historically policies have created a passive welfare environment in Indigenous communities which resulted in a retraction of positive social norms, and fostered the displacement of Indigenous responsibility. People in receipt of welfare payments, or who are participating in community employment programs, not only have an obligation to their community not to behave in ways which are detrimental, but must reciprocate with economic engagement and actively support their community.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous people living in the welfare reform communities receiving welfare or community employment program payments are subject to the Commission's jurisdiction. Jurisdiction continues if the individual relocates from the community.

The *Family Responsibilities Commission Act 2008* (the FRC Act) was passed in the Queensland Parliament with bipartisan support on 13 March 2008. The Commission commenced operating on 1 July 2008 and conferencing began on 12 August 2008 with the first sitting being held in Coen. As regulated by the FRC Act at that time the Commission was to cease operations on 1 January 2012. Each subsequent year until 2014, following Australian and State Government consultations and budget allocations, the Commission was granted 12 month extensions.

On 5 August 2014 the Family Responsibilities Commission Amendment Bill 2014 was introduced into Parliament. The Bill, which was passed by Parliament on 14 October 2014 and proclaimed on 28 November 2014, proposed the following amendments aimed at increasing efficiencies and expanding operations:

- to omit the FRC Act's sunset clause (section 152), which states that the FRC Act expires on 1 January 2015
- to amend the definition of welfare reform community area in the FRC Act to replace specific references to communities (Aurukun, Hope Vale, Coen and Mossman Gorge) with "an area prescribed by regulation as a welfare reform community area"
- to add new 'justice triggers' for notifications to the Commission if a community member is convicted in the District or Supreme Courts, or a child is convicted in a court
- to amend the disqualification provisions for Local Commissioners and
- to require the Family Responsibilities Board (FR Board) to meet every six months, rather than quarterly.

On 14 July 2015 the Queensland State Treasurer Curtis Pitt released the 2015-16 State Budget wherein it was announced that the State Government would continue to revitalise frontline services with further financial support for Welfare Reform until 30 June 2019.

A further legislative development affecting Commission operations was the passing of the Family Responsibilities Commission Amendment Bill 2015 by Parliament with unanimous support on

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1 December 2015. The Bill which received Royal Assent on 17 December proposed to increase the effectiveness of the FRC Act by:

- including an additional domestic violence trigger in response to recommendations in the Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland's report, 'Not Now, Not Ever: Putting an End to Domestic Violence in Queensland'
- expanding the scope for delegation of the FRC Commissioner's powers and responsibilities to the Local Commissioners
- broadening the suitability requirements for the Registrar to more accurately reflect the operational elements of the role
- removing redundant provisions and
- improving information availability in regard to the existing youth justice trigger.

A Bill to amend the Commonwealth *Social Security Administration Act 1999* to extend the income management legislative mechanism utilised by the FRC from 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2019 in the welfare reform communities was passed by the Australian Parliament and received Royal Assent on 26 June 2017. The Australian Labour Party and Australian Greens supported the Bill on the basis that an independent evaluation of income management in the welfare reform communities be undertaken. To date the Australian Government has not provided dates or the Terms of Reference for this review.

## About us

As part of the broader Welfare Reforms, the Commission has the lead role in these unique reforms aimed at restoring local authority and socially responsible standards of behaviour in Aurukun, Coen, Doomadgee, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge.

Local Commissioners are Elders or respected community members who encourage individuals appearing before the Commission to take the necessary steps to make lasting changes which will benefit their health, wellbeing, home and community life.

The Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner and Local Commissioners meet regularly to conference clients and make referrals to community support services, or in certain circumstances, to the Department of Human Services, Centrelink for income management.

## Policy context

Our activities support the Welfare Reforms and the Statement of Objectives for the Community published by the Queensland Government. The Commission contributes specifically to the following Government objectives:

- "Creating jobs and a diverse economy – increasing workforce participation" – by working to reduce passive welfare, assisting clients to increase their financial stability and initiating a continuous improvement strategy in regard to our organisational capability
- "Delivering quality frontline services" – by providing effective and efficient client services for families, strengthening collaborative cross-agency partnerships to support local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authorities, improving access to relevant service provision in the communities and working to increase school enrolment and attendance
- "Building safe, caring and connected communities" – by influencing the wider acceptance of socially responsible standards of behaviour, promoting Indigenous local authority and nurturing a spirit of inquiry and innovation in order to address the complex problems facing the welfare reform communities.



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The fundamental principles of the Queensland Public Service Code of Conduct are strictly adhered to and the principles of natural justice, conflict of interest and confidentiality are established and strongly reinforced with employees and Local Commissioners through the Commission's Workplace Policy, the Local Commissioners' Handbook, the Local Commissioners' Conference Guidelines and annual on-line training in Ethical Decision Making and the Code of Conduct.

Our activities specifically support DATSIP which is the department responsible for promoting and monitoring the government's progress in Closing the Gap on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage. There are eight strategic areas for action established under the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) for driving the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reforms, seven of which the Commission addresses through its conferencing processes and participation in collaborative cross-agency partnerships:

- Early childhood – improving child and maternal health care, supporting good parenting and strengthening childhood education and care through early intervention
- Schooling – supporting the improvement of literacy and numeracy levels and year 12 or equivalent attainment of children in our communities by providing guidance, encouragement and information to families on the requirement for children to attend school
- Health – closing the gap in health and longevity
- Economic participation – closing the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples
- Safe communities – addressing the problem of violence, alcohol, criminal and anti-social behaviours
- Governance and leadership – enhancing government policies and systems to improve engagement mechanisms, developing and supporting community capacity and leadership and supporting the development of leadership for women and young people
- Land and culture – promoting and affirming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

The Commission supports the 'Towards a Queensland action plan for vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families' by participating in round table forums and working groups and empowering/stabilising families through the conferencing and referral processes.

## Our challenge

The Commission delivers services to five communities, all of which are culturally unique and some of which are geographically remote. Each community is different, however, each can be characterised by the entrenched disadvantage of Indigenous community members. High rates of Indigenous welfare dependency and multi-generational poverty have resulted in communities with high numbers of individuals and families with complex needs.

Our challenge is to work collaboratively with partner agencies, as part of a linked service system to engage, empower and enable individuals, families and the wider community to make positive and lasting change. In meeting this challenge the Commission is supporting the 'Moving Ahead' program – a whole-of-government strategy to improve Indigenous economic participation. The Commission interacts with the strategy by referring individuals to public services, assisting community members to gain benefits from available opportunities and improving student transitions to education.

Our Local Commissioners collaborate with the community to identify and resolve critical issues, advocate for their community by meeting with Ministers and government departments, and assist in ensuring that informed decisions are made by the transparent sharing of information.

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