

# COMMISSIONER GLASGOW'S MESSAGE



## From the Commissioner

The Family Responsibilities Commission has completed eleven years of operations in the four Cape York Welfare Reform (CYWR) communities of Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge, and five years in Doomadgee.

I have had the privilege of leading the Commission since our commencement on 1 July 2008, ably assisted since July 2010 by Deputy Commissioners Jim Brooks, whose appointment expired on 1 January 2012, and Rodney Curtin, whose appointment expired on 31 December 2018. I retire as Commissioner on 1 September 2019.

Since 1 January my role has been conducted without the support of a Deputy which has limited the occasions I have been able to visit our communities.

Though fully capable of carrying out their functions and conducting conferencing, there are frequent occasions where Local Commissioners have sought support and guidance.

My successor will be required to travel extensively to regularly visit the five communities, not only to become familiar with each, but to get to know the Local Commissioners and proactively manage the many and varied challenges facing the Local Commissioners in their work. These challenges include the performance of service providers, community and family conflicts, dealings with and performance by government officers, explaining the impact of legislation and debriefing after difficult conferencing sessions. Additionally, the Commissioner is regularly called upon to assist community members and Local Commissioners with advice on personal matters.

Availability of advice and continuing in-situ support is essential in my view, as is the opportunity for them to attend at an annual conference of all Commissioners and have access to confidential professional counselling when required. Their ability to rely on such assistance is critical to their ongoing success and development.

In November 2018 the Australian Government announced a three year funding commitment to the FRC from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2021. The release of these funds is subject to the finalisation of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Queensland Government which is still in negotiations. Consequently, the Commission completed this financial year with a deficit of \$183,015.

## Local Commissioners

I again acknowledge the women and men who are the Local Commissioners. They are leaders of outstanding capability who are as comfortable negotiating with bureaucrats and Ministers, as they are meeting with and assisting their fellow community members.

They have, however, been perplexed with the unexplained changes in Queensland Government policy concerning the Commission and have been unable to obtain any clarity of detail in regard to that policy.



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In the current year Local Commissioners have independently conducted most conferences. The following table shows their workload.

**Table 1: The percentage of conferences conducted with Local Commissioners sitting alone by community 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019.**

Community	Conferences with Local Commissioners Sitting Alone	Total Number of Conferences Held	Percentage of Conferences with Local Commissioners Sitting Alone
Aurukun	1,066	1,090	97.8%
Coen <sup>1</sup>	34	79	43.0%
Doomadgee	1,048	1,051	99.7%
Hope Vale	326	337	96.7%
Mossman Gorge	125	125	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,599</b>	<b>2,682</b>	<b>96.9%</b>

1. Coen Commissioners are all engaged in full-time employment. On some occasions only two Local Commissioners have been available. On such occasions the FRC Commissioner attends either in person or by phone.

The Local Commissioners live every day with the responsibility for, and reaction to, their decisions and are often subject to threats and abuse. The Commission ensures that debriefing and professional counselling is readily available to them and their families.

The Commission's work in strengthening Indigenous local authority, building and maintaining respect for Indigenous decision-making, and encouraging local community members to take responsibility for their lives is acknowledged by both State and Australian Parliaments.

In each community there has been significant and lasting improvement to the wellbeing, safety and education of its children.

## Griffith Neighbourhoods Project

I was informed on 20 May that the contract between the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DATSIP) and the Griffith Neighbourhoods Project would not be extended past 28 June 2019. Aurukun Commissioners who have worked with this project since early 2009 are concerned there is no alternative service provider that provides the same level of programs in Aurukun, and that there will be a significant impact on the community with its departure. They have on their own initiative made submissions to the Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, the Honourable Jackie Trad MP, and the Aurukun Ministerial Champion the Honourable Di Farmer MP, Minister for the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (DCSYW) and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, to reconsider their decision. DCSYW has advised that Youth Empowered Towards Independence has been approved as the successful provider to deliver the project for the 12-month period 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020, and it is hoped the capacity building which is a key feature of the program will build upon the great work already carried out by members of the Griffith Neighbourhoods Project team.

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## Conditional income management

Since the Commission commenced in July 2008 some concern has been expressed as to whether the Local Commissioners should have the authority to income-manage clients. The Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Income Management and Cashless Welfare) Bill 2019 providing for the extension of the Commission's powers to 30 June 2020 was passed with the support of the Labor opposition in the Australian Parliament on 4 April 2019 and received Royal Assent on 5 April 2019.

Unlike other trials, the FRC was never part of a blanket income management program. Commissioners have always considered each client on a case by case basis with Conditional Income Management (CIM) issued as a last resort. It is informative to consider how that power was exercised over this eleven-year period by the Commissioners.

**Table 2: Percentage of clients who were placed on conditional income management for each financial year 2008 to 2019.**

Financial Year	Number of CIM Orders Made	Number of Unique Clients Placed on CIM	Total Number of FRC Clients at 30 June	Percentage of Clients Placed on CIM as at 30 June
2008-2009	89	84	Unavailable	Unavailable
2009-2010	232	217	1,047	20.7%
2010-2011	223	205	1,191	17.2%
2011-2012	218	208	1,344	15.5%
2012-2013	304	268	1,467	18.3%
2013-2014	304	239	1,566	15.3%
2014-2015	238	194	1,856	10.5%
2015-2016	249	202	2,000	10.1%
2016-2017	265	212	2,164	9.8%
2017-2018	233	179	2,312	7.7%
2018-2019	233	176	2,423	7.3%

As at 30 June 2019 140 clients were subject to a current CIM order, although as can be seen from table 2, a total of 176 unique clients were placed on a CIM order throughout the entire 2018-19 year.

## Commission staff

I acknowledge the professionalism of our Registrar Maxine McLeod and Executive Officer (Finance) Tracey Paterson in the management of the Commission's operations.

Our staff in Cairns and the community based Local Coordinators have continued their commitment and dedication in carrying out their respective duties, notwithstanding that each face continuing uncertainty about their futures.



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## The Commission's future

It must be recognised there have been no amendments to the FRC Act since 2015, and I as Commissioner am obliged to conduct the business of the Commission in accordance with its provisions. The Commission's partners, the State and Australian Governments, contribute equally to the funding of the Commission's work in the four welfare reform communities of Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge, with the State funding the community of Doomadgee. They are not, however, in accord about the future operations of the Commission.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison MP affirmed his Government's policy in Parliament on 29 November 2018 when he stated:

*"The Cape York Institute and the people of the Cape York Welfare Reform communities of Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge have been at the cutting edge of addressing welfare dependency and school attendance in this country. I commend all of those who have been part of that community-led approach."*

*The Family Responsibilities Commission is a model centred on the community that supported the restoration of the local Indigenous authority. The FRC is acknowledged as the most critical component of the CYWR, and the FRC conferences encourage individuals and families to engage in positive behaviours whilst promoting the interests, rights and wellbeing of children and vulnerable community members. The positive impact on communities has been driven by the excellent work of the Local Commissioners. Taking such a strong stance against antisocial behaviour has been a very challenging and demanding commitment for these leaders, however, they have stuck fast to their vision of strong communities that are free from the welfare trap. We should all commend them for the amazing work and their resilience."*

Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, the Honourable Jackie Trad MP, advised State Parliament on presenting the Commission's 2017–2018 Annual Report on Friday 22 March 2019:

*"The Queensland Government values the role of the Local Commissioners in re-establishing local authority and decision-making in the Welfare Reform communities."*

*In the last year, they held 2,539 conferences to provide personalised support, and made 122 referrals to service providers for 107 clients."*

*We will continue to support and build on the work done by the FRC Local Commissioners as part of the Queensland Government's Local Thriving Communities reform agenda which is being led by the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships."*

*The reform comes in response to a Queensland Productivity Commission inquiry into service delivery in Queensland's 19 remote and discrete communities, including the Welfare Reform communities."*

*It also responds to requests from Mayors and other Indigenous leaders in these communities for better governance, economic opportunities, and greater community engagement in planning and delivery."*

*The Local Thriving Communities agenda will be co-designed with remote and discrete community members and will honour the role of communities in identifying their own priorities and solutions to issues."*

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*It will build on existing strengths, leverage local leadership and be delivered with a local emphasis, meaning that priorities and the way they are addressed may differ across communities.*

*Stakeholders like the Local Commissioners will be critical to understanding existing support structures, and designing and delivering effective future plans that empower Queensland's remote and discrete communities to thrive.*

*Community engagement on the Welfare Reform program, including the FRC, and the co-design process for Local Thriving Communities reform will occur through 2019."*

The Queensland Productivity Commission (QPC) inquiry into service delivery in remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is available at: <https://www.qpc.qld.gov.au/inquiries/service-delivery-in-queenslands-remote-and-discrete-indigenous-communities/>.

QPC Commissioner Bronwyn Fredericks who chaired the Inquiry has been clear publicly that the report cannot be used by Government to justify transitioning from the FRC, or any other program. As the QPC report itself explicitly states, the focus of the inquiry was "to examine the overarching policy, governance and funding framework that overlays all services" across all remote and discrete Indigenous communities (page ix of the [FINAL REPORT into Service delivery in remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities](#)).

The Strategic Review of Cape York Income Management report (<https://www.dss.gov.au/families-and-children-programs-services-welfare-quarantining-income-management/strategic-review-of-cape-york-income-management>) produced by Professor John Scott of the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) on behalf of the Department of Social Services (DSS) in November 2018 stated:

*"There is a clear view in the current CYWR communities that the FRC should continue in some form; presumably because this goal of community-wide empowerment has not yet been achieved. With regard to any continuation of CYIM specifically, a Hope Vale Local Commissioner (in Focus Group 2, 2018, p. 26) stated, 'My concern is that, you know, you got all the findings, you have picked our brain about what's good, what's bad, what's been, you know... and then the Government think they can do it [deliver CYIM] on their own. They cannot. That's the clear message out of this. The Government cannot do this, without a body managing it on the ground...'*

*This view is supported by the findings of this review; CYIM is able to overcome many of the problems with IM schemes elsewhere because it is delivered through the context of the FRC. This context is a key component of any 'successes' that can be attributed to the Cape York scheme." (page 84)*

Further at page 90:

*"Cape York communities are looking to make a decision about evolving from CYWR towards new arrangements based on the empowerment/development model. There is an expectation from communities that this review will inform a decision about the future of welfare quarantining in Cape York and what role the current CYIM approach can/should have in any future models. Different communities have different needs and may come to different conclusions. Consultation and implementation are critically important to any future extension of the CYWR, FRC and/or CYIM. Consultation should be broad (involving a significant proportion of the community) and deep (i.e. cover not just theoretical models, but also*



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*the realities of how the models would apply in practice). By gaining widespread, informed endorsement of any future models, it may be possible to improve early take-up and support of any new models."*

According to information provided to me by DATSIP through their 'Thriving Remote and Discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities Fact Sheet', Local Thriving Communities will focus on building structural reform (local decision-making through community owned governance structures), service delivery reform and economic reform. This is reform work at the community level aimed at reframing the relationship between the Queensland Government and the communities.

The Commission, on the other hand, works at the individual level, assisting the individual to resume primary responsibility for their wellbeing and subsequently the wellbeing of their families - promoting the individual's social responsibility. It is my view that the Commission and Local Thriving Communities could work side by side as they have different and distinct functions which could complement each other. The Commission seeks to promote social responsibility and Indigenous authority, whilst Local Thriving Communities seeks to empower local community groups to make decisions regarding the provision of services within their community.

The Commission awaits the outcome of the required Local Thriving Communities consultations with communities and a decision on its future.

**David Glasgow, AM**  
**Family Responsibilities Commissioner**

*Local Commissioners from Aurukun, Coen, Doomadgee, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge with Commissioner Glasgow at the Local Commissioner Development Week June 2019*

