



# LOCAL COMMISSIONERS' YEAR IN REVIEW

## Doomadgee Commissioners' report

The last 12 months has been an eventful time for us here in Doomadgee. Primary school attendance for Term 3 (July to September 2018) was 50.2 percent, increasing to 60.3 percent for Term 1 2019. Maintaining good school attendance in Doomadgee remains a struggle which we are attempting to address every day. Several events affected attendance including the Mount Isa Mines Rodeo and the Gulf Country Frontier Days Festival at Gregory Downs (both in August). In addition, sorry business had a significant impact with the passing of Elders from a couple of larger family groups, the funerals for which were held in Mount Isa and Mornington Island. Additionally, a number of the funerals were postponed or delayed - in some cases for weeks after the passing of a family member or loved one. As a result, the time between non-attendance and re-engagement at school was, on occasion, a lengthy two to four-week period. Sorry business is however an important part of our identity as Indigenous people and we value our culture in mourning our family members who have passed. We believe that clear guidelines for the management of sorry business may assist us to maintain our cultural practices whilst also emphasising the importance of education.

Local community parties with loud music playing all hours of the night has also affected attendance with children being too tired to attend school the next day. Term 1 of 2019 was impacted by the disaster recovery payments received in community, even though there was very little severe weather experienced in Doomadgee. These payments resulted in an influx of alcohol into the community and an increase of domestic violence incidents, both of which contributed to the low school attendance. School staff conducted numerous home visits during school hours and after school to draw students back into the classroom.

As Local Commissioners we continually reinforce the importance of school attendance in the community and we will always do so as long as we remain Local Commissioners. We know that a good education is the only certainty to ensuring a good future for our children, and a good future for our community as a whole.

The first term of 2019 at the Doomadgee State School saw the commencement of a new Acting Principal, Beth Everill, and several new teachers. Beth has now been appointed as the Principal and has reintroduced monthly parent and community meetings and we, together with the parents and carers, consider this a positive move to creating a harmonious and constructive learning environment. Upgrades on the school grounds have been completed and are excellent. Our school environment is now very inviting with a water feature filling up during the wet season to provide the children with a seasonal playground. The design of the improvements of the grounds is innovative and much work has also gone into providing the children with breakfast and lunch options to enhance learning.

One pleasing result has been boarding school numbers which have stayed consistent, and interest remained high in families wanting to make applications for the 2019 school year. Our Local Coordinator has continued to play a pivotal role in supporting local families with the transition of their children to boarding school. Assistance has been provided with application paperwork, identification requirements, organising school interviews, the distribution of itineraries and transport to and from the airport. We are proud to say that there are now 41 Doomadgee students attending boarding schools. We believe that more effort should be spent on preparing children to leave community to further their education, and the preparation should commence from year 6 to ensure they are ready for boarding school. For our children

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to leave their families at such a tender age and live outside of our environment, it is a traumatic adjustment. Much more work needs to be done to prepare them scholastically and emotionally for this transition which is life changing. Transition support is offered by the school, but only offered for a nominated four hours per week. We believe it should be a full-time position.

Of great concern to us in the later part of this financial year has been that our Deputy Commissioner was not reappointed upon the expiry of his term on 31 December 2018. We were given no reason as to why his appointment was not renewed. We feel the Government has taken a family member away from us. Former Deputy Commissioner Rod Curtin was a support and mentor to us. There is no colour division in our community. We were told the Government wished to appoint an Indigenous Deputy Commissioner. For us, it is those who identify with us who become part of our community and the Deputy Commissioner was all that and more. In fact we adopted him as family. He understood our struggles and our hurt. He connected with our clients. We always looked forward to seeing him. It has been a great loss to us in Doomadgee.

We have been furthering our skills in applying income management in a positive way to encourage clients to prioritise their children's needs. Attitudes are difficult to change, but we adopt a softly-softly approach while offering support and reassurance that we understand the difficulties of being parents/carers. As at the end of the financial year we have 71 clients on Conditional Income Management (an increase of 22 on last year's figure), and one client on Voluntary Income Management.

The Youth Hub is transitioning into a flexi-school for primary and secondary disengaged students. We would dearly like to see some progress with these students and eagerly await news of initial outcomes achieved or challenges experienced.

Strengthening our relationship during the year with the police in Doomadgee has been a challenge for us. We don't feel the community really got to know them and we would like to see an improvement in the coming year with the commencement of the new Officer in Charge. We would like to erase any past negativity as we feel a good working relationship will strengthen our community to the advantage of both the police and the community.

Visits from the Department of Human Services (Centrelink) team are currently occurring for one week in every 10-week period. Staff at the Remote Jobs and Communities Programme in Doomadgee (My Pathways) have the view there are at least 100 community members eligible for welfare payments that are either not in receipt of any payment or are not receiving all their entitlements due to children not being registered with Centrelink for payment.

Other fly-in/fly-out service providers fall short in promoting their visits to community with many community members unaware of their impending arrival. Better information about the benefits of attending these services, programs and clinics would improve participation.

Existing services that we are able to refer our clients to for support are often failing in their obligation to engage these clients in a positive and constructive conversation to address their needs. We find there is a lack of information and openness concerning our clients, and we are left unsure as to what if any action has been taken to assist them.

We would like more triggers other than Education (school attendance and school enrolment related matters) and Child Safety and Welfare notices. In particular we would like to receive notices for tenancy violations and domestic violence incidents.



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On a positive note, every second Wednesday Commissioner Douglas' son, Elijah, conducts a community event with traditional dancing and songs at Riverside Park. This event attracts young and old community members and assists us with passing on our culture to the young ones. As reported in last year's report, the Police-Citizens Youth Club (PCYC) left community due to the loss of their leased premises. Elijah's events assist in providing a little entertainment for our children which is constructive in the absence of the PCYC.

Collaborative service provider meetings recommenced after an absence in the last quarter of 2018. These meetings promote the sharing of ideas to provide wraparound services that holistically support families within the community. Our Local Coordinator has worked with local service providers and DATSIP to ensure positive engagement with young people, including their participation in some after school programs and events.

We are sad to announce that we commenced 2019 without one of our colleagues. Commissioner Karen Jupiter transferred to Townsville in late 2018 for extended medical treatment. Unfortunately, this relocation may become a permanent situation and it has been at times challenging for the five of us remaining to maintain our energy, positivity and resilience with our reduced numbers and the uncertainty affecting our future roles. We need more Local Commissioners to bolster our strength in Doomadgee. Being a Local Commissioner is a very responsible position. We live and breathe our jobs during and outside of our work hours and we do this whilst juggling other paid positions. Some young blood to take over in the next few years would give us firmer foundations from which to continue building our influence in changing social norms.

**Doomadgee Commissioners Christopher Logan, Elaine Cairns, Karen Jupiter, Kaylene O'Keefe, Eleanor Logan and Guy Douglas.**



*Former Deputy Commissioner Curtin, then Doomadgee Local Coordinator Bryce Coxall with Doomadgee Commissioners Christopher Logan, Karen Jupiter, Kaylene O'Keefe, Eleanor Logan and Elaine Cairns*