



LOCAL COMMISSIONERS' YEAR IN REVIEW

Aurukun Commissioners' report

The last year has been full of highs and lows for us as Local Commissioners. It has been hard to stay positive with the uncertainty surrounding the continuation of the Commission, however, we are only in our positions to support our community, and we will continue to put in 100 percent to do so.

The Aurukun State School worked hard with the community right up until the end of 2018 and this saw a 5.6 percent attendance increase in the primary year levels from 2017. Unfortunately, the overall attendance figure is still below 50 percent, so there remains a lot of work to be done. We would like to thank the parents who continue to have their children at school every day regardless of what is happening in community, and for the parents that continue to struggle, we are here to help.

The end of 2018 saw almost 60 percent of the school staff leave including Principal Mike Ennis. We would like to thank all the school staff for their time in Aurukun and we appreciate you sharing your lives with us and teaching our children. With such a big change of staff at the school we were nervous about a slow start to 2019. Together with our new principal, Paula Maguire, and new teachers we were very pleased to see the attendance for weeks 1 and 2 at around 60 percent.

Early in 2019 the Aurukun community was shocked and in mourning with the passing of local Elder and recognised artist Mavis Ngallametta. Her passing sent a shock wave through the community which unfortunately reflected on the school attendance figures. This was an extremely sad time for our community and the school attendance figures reflected the impact, declining by around 20 percent.

Severe weather events took their toll on our community early in 2019. We had the normal wet season flooding and torrential rain, but this was then backed up with Cyclone Trevor in March which again impacted our school attendance figures. Following the cyclone all community members received a cyclone payment from the State Government of \$1000 per person. While this was helpful after almost a week with no power, we believe the funding arrangements could have been managed better. The instant flood of money into community reflects the issues we have when people receive their tax returns. More money means more drugs and alcohol. More drugs and alcohol means fewer children at school and more violence in the households.

We had several influential visitors this year who met with us, including the then Special Envoy for Indigenous Affairs, the Honourable Tony Abbott, MP. We took this opportunity to express our upset at the possible closing of the Commission and spoke about the negative effects that we predict will happen should the closure eventuate. Mr Abbott expressed his full support to back us in extending the life of the FRC which was great to hear.

With all the talk of the FRC being shut down we formally requested to meet face to face with the new Director-General of DATSIP Dr Chris Sarra to discuss our future. We were pleased Dr Sarra took the time to come to Aurukun and meet with us as a group. We are still confused, however, as to the Queensland Government's new Local Thriving Communities model with which he is proposing to replace the FRC. All that we ask as Local Commissioners and community members is to be involved in any new changes or programs that come into our community, and to have our views and concerns considered prior to any decisions being made.

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On a positive note our fellow Local Commissioner Ada Woolla has been appointed to the Queensland First Children and Families Board. The Board will oversee the implementation of *Our Way – A generational strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families 2017 – 2037* and *Changing Tracks – An action plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families 2017 – 2019*.

We were very proud to see Aurukun children working closely with the Queensland Music Festival (QMF) for the seventh year running. QMF has set such high expectations for the Aurukun children and it makes us very happy to see our children exceed these expectations and travel out of community to perform with QMF.

Due to the uncertainty surrounding the continuation of our positions, our service referrals have dramatically reduced. We did not want to start our clients on case plans and false promises to see everything cease not long after. But we will carry on as normal with the continuation of our positions (although we don't know for how long) and we will aim to lift all of our referrals, income management decisions and support to our clients to hopefully see some big improvements in Aurukun in the coming months.

Development in the Aurukun community is moving forward with the continuation of new community housing, new Government housing, new accommodation for elders at the aged care facility, a new splash park for the children and much more. These new developments have many benefits to our community, from creating jobs to better housing and better care for our elders. It's exciting to see the continuation of these projects. We were also lucky enough to have a fully refurbished Justice Group building which is where we conduct our conferencing.

As the year moves on, it is the sound of the children playing in the school grounds that inspires us to continue to work hard to lead and support our community to the best of our ability.

Aurukun Commissioners Edgar Kerindun, Doris Poonkamelya, Ada Woolla, Dorothy Pootchemunka, Vera Koomeeta and Keri Tamwoy.

Aurukun Splash Park

