

# 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

- Safety:** We value the right of everyone to live in safe communities.
- Respect:** We believe that respect for oneself builds the foundation for wellbeing.
- Ownership:** We are committed to encouraging communities to take ownership of their present and future.
- Innovation:** We actively seek and encourage creative ideas to build the potential for lasting change.
- Empowerment:** We are committed to empowering people to take the initiative to reform their communities and build their own direction and future.
- Diversity:** 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.



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## 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.

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 to initiate early intervention in order to address issues and behaviours before they escalate 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.

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

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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 7 August 2014 under the Family Responsibilities Commission Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2014 Doomadgee was prescribed by regulation as a welfare reform community area. The decision to add Doomadgee by regulation was made following an extensive community consultation process conducted over a period of eight months.

In October 2014 the Queensland Parliament passed the Family Responsibilities Commission Amendment Bill 2014, with the Bill receiving Royal Assent on 27 October 2014 and the subsequent Act proclaimed on 28 November 2014. Among other amendments aimed at increasing efficiencies and expanding operations, the FRC Act's sunset clause (s152) was removed, enabling the Act to continue indefinitely. The Family Responsibilities Commission Amendment Bill 2014 also allowed for further welfare reform communities to be added by regulation.

On 14 July 2015 the then 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 1 December 2015. The Bill which received Royal Assent on 17 December, included an additional domestic violence trigger, and expanded the scope for delegation of the FRC Commissioner's power and responsibilities to Local Commissioners.

A Bill to amend the Commonwealth *Social Security Administration Act 1999* to extend the income management mechanism 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 Labor Party and Australian Greens supported the Bill on the basis that an independent evaluation of income management in the welfare reform communities be undertaken, with DSS commencing a Strategic Review of Income Management in Cape York. DSS officers attended the FRC's Local Commissioner Development Week in May 2018 to seek first-hand accounts from Local Commissioners about the effectiveness of income management in Cape York.



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Between March and June 2018, DATSIP, the Australian Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) and Cape York Partnership (CYP) representing the Institute undertook community consultations in each Cape York welfare reform community, whilst DATSIP undertook the consultations in Doomadgee. The purpose of the community consultations was to identify local perceptions of the impact of Welfare Reform and inform its evolution.

A number of developments concerning the Commission's future occurred during the 2018-19 financial year. On 27 November 2018, at the Cape York Partnership forum, The Clock is Ticking, the Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, the Honourable Jackie Trad MP, announced that the FRC and welfare reform model would be transitioning to an approach called Local Thriving Communities.

The Strategic Review of Cape York Income Management commissioned by DSS was released on 3 December 2018. It concluded that evidence concerning the outcomes and impacts of Cape York Income Management (CYIM) was mixed. On page 89 it states: *"In some cases there is evidence that the FRC and CYIM have contributed to a reduction in alcohol, drugs, violence and crime. There is also evidence that outcomes have improved in terms of children's overall health and wellbeing, and engagement with school"*.

On 5 April 2019 the Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Income Management and Cashless Welfare) Bill 2019 passed both Houses of the Australian Parliament, extending CYIM to 30 June 2020.

The Queensland budget was tabled in State Parliament on Tuesday, 11 June 2019. In that budget the Queensland Government announced its commitment to continue funding the Commission for the 2019-20 year. As at 30 June 2019 the State and Australian Governments are continuing negotiations in regard to the Australian Government's contribution to the funding of the Commission which was offered for a three year term from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2021.

## 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 (whilst appointed) and Local Commissioners meet regularly to conference clients and make referrals to community support services, or in certain circumstances, to Centrelink for income management.

## Policy context

Our activities support Welfare Reform and Our Future State: Advancing Queensland's Priorities published by the Queensland Government. The Commission contributes specifically to the following Government priorities:



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## CREATE JOBS IN A STRONG ECONOMY

by working to reduce passive welfare, assisting clients to increase their financial stability; and by initiating a continuous improvement strategy for our organisational capability



## GIVE ALL OUR CHILDREN A GREAT START

by supporting expectant mothers and young families in welfare reform communities to access maternal and child health, early childhood education and care services, and to understand the importance of the early years to the long-term health and wellbeing of their children



## KEEP QUEENSLANDERS HEALTHY

by working with service providers to support the delivery of effective responses to alcohol and drug misuse, mental illness and violence for our clients in the welfare reform communities and developing self-care and resilience in Local Commissioners



## KEEP COMMUNITIES SAFE

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



## BE A RESPONSIVE GOVERNMENT

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.

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 online 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 seven strategic areas for action established under the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) for driving the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reforms 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



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- 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 'Our Way Strategy', formerly known as '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 and 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 Strategy', 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.

There have now been three independent evaluative exercises with a focus on the FRC since its establishment. The conclusions in each have been very promising (refer the 2010 KPMG Implementation Review of the Family Responsibilities Commission, and the 2012 Cape York Welfare Reform Evaluation). Most recently, the 2018 Strategic Review of Cape York Income Management, conducted by QUT and commissioned by DSS provides evidence for building upon the progress of the past decade.

There is no doubt the FRC has successfully re-established local authority, although ongoing broadening and renewal has not yet occurred. There is little support for the notion that the FRC is a punitive model. It is clearly not. Rather there is a great deal of evidence that suggests that FRC clients feel supported by the FRC. Considering aggregate community level data which does not seek to isolate the impact of the FRC intervention falls short of revealing the true effectiveness of the FRC. Our challenge, and the challenge of the Queensland and Australian Governments is to build upon the lessons learnt, expand upon the model to incorporate community led reforms and to tackle more broadly the complex and entrenched intergenerational disadvantage which affects many Indigenous communities.

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