



Community operations Coen

FRC operations in Coen were undertaken by Local Commissioners May Kepple, Elaine Liddy, Alison Liddy and Maureen Liddy, supported by Acting Local Registry Coordinators Cara Marks and Kate Gooding. An account of their operations during the reporting period follows.

Coen Commissioners' report

This year our community was plagued by sorry business which meant that many conferences needed to be postponed. The postponement of conferences led to a change in our strategy, and priority was given to continued engagement with vulnerable clients outside of the formal conferencing environment. Home visits were conducted offering clients the opportunity to opt into voluntary referrals or the Intensive Case Management framework. We made significant progress in achieving positive outcomes in partnership with our clients and service providers this year as evidenced below.

Significant achievements

- Voluntary agreements for voluntary case plans increased from 6 to 28, an increase of 367 percent from the 2021-22 financial year.
- Voluntary agreements for voluntary income management increased from 15 to 25, an increase of 67 percent.
- Conference attendance rose to 75.9 percent this year and is the highest attendance since the commencement of the Commission.

Challenges

Local Commissioner appointments

Sorry business and the availability of Local Commissioners had a significant impact on the number of conferences held this financial year. The appointment of new Local Commissioners in Coen to join our team is considered critical to allow for a pool of Local Commissioners to convene a decision-making panel, to maintain consistency of operations, and to provide gender balance and greater clan group diversity from the five main clan groups the Ayapathu, Kaanju, Lama Lama, Umpila and Wik-Mungkan peoples. On 29 June 2023 the Commission was advised the Governor in Council had approved the appointment of two more new Local Commissioners for Coen, Ms Naomi Hobson and Ms Ramana Walker for the period 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2026. We warmly welcome the appointment of the two new Local Commissioners in Coen. The new additions to our team will provide the ability of Local Commissioners to be relieved as needed and inject new perspectives into conferencing and other work in the Coen community.

Legislative constraints

As in 2022 we again raise our concern in regard to the legislative constraints which affect the recruitment of new Local Commissioners. The *Family Responsibilities Commission Act 2008* as it currently stands, disqualifies a person from being a Local Commissioner if they have been the

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subject of a family responsibilities agreement or a FRC decision¹ in the past. An amendment to the legislation would increase opportunities for deserving community members to apply and would alleviate the pressures on us as current sitting members.

Increase in domestic violence offences

The FRC in Coen is concerned at the 43 percent increase in Domestic Violence Order notices received when compared to the previous financial year with 20 notices received in 2022-23 compared to 14 in 2021-22. For a community of our size this increase is concerning because of the effects domestic violence has on the wellbeing of the family and children. Any increase means that there is one too many families in crisis. We are further concerned at the lack of referral pathways for domestic violence offenders tailored to facilitate behaviour change. We cannot hope to see a reduction in domestic violence offences without an effective perpetrator program to stop the cycle.

Other community matters

Voluntary engagements

Despite having to postpone conferences throughout the 2022-23 financial year, the FRC in Coen remained committed to supporting our clients in a respectful way during sorry business and to provide opportunities for community members to engage with the Commission on a voluntary basis, outside of the formal conference environment.

This has led to a significant increase in the number of clients signing voluntary agreements for Voluntary Income Management (VIM) with a total of 25 VIM agreements this year. It is noteworthy that as at 30 June 2023 the majority of our clients on income management are voluntary (18 clients on VIM and only 1 client on CIM). VIM has been an invaluable tool for our elderly and vulnerable clients assisting them to protect their welfare payments and ensuring adequate funds for essential items. The increased number of VIM agreements has also resulted in an increase of voluntary referrals to the Cape York Partnership O-Hub money management program where participants agreed to access support for their budgeting and savings needs. We are pleased that our clients have an interest in linking improved financial literacy with voluntary income management.

School attendance

The Coen Campus of the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy (CYAAA) recorded 88 percent school attendance in Term 1 2023, the highest primary school attendance for selected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Queensland for the term. The FRC in Coen is extremely proud of the way we have worked with the school and fostered a close relationship with the Principal for reciprocal information sharing. Having up to date information has assisted us in engaging with families to address school attendance concerns. This collaborative approach and early intervention method has supported the good school attendance which is currently being experienced in Coen.

1. Section 20(1)(iii) disqualifies a person from being a Local Commissioner if ‘the person is, or has been, the subject of a family responsibilities agreement or a decision of the Commission under section 69(1)(b)’.



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NAIDOC Week activities

Coen celebrated National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) Week early this year. The celebratory week beginning 5 June was an organised partnership between the FRC, Cape York Partnership, Coen CYAAA, Coen Regional Aboriginal Corporation and the Apunipima Wellbeing Centre. In line with this year's NAIDOC theme, 'For Our Elders', we recognised the important role our Elders have played, and continue to play, in our community by celebrating them throughout the week. We were delighted to see our partners and community come together in solidarity organising and participating in the week of events. We attended many of the events including a school band performance and concert, a breakfast for the community, a candlelight remembrance walk for those lost to suicide, a NAIDOC ball and a NAIDOC march.

The next 12 months

As FRC in Coen we continue to advocate for service delivery gaps to be filled in regard to domestic and family violence, and child and youth services. For several years we have expressed concern about the mental health and wellness of our people, with far too many families bereaved by suicide. We wish there were more suicide prevention programs available tailored to the needs of our community members. Then we could, as an early intervention approach, refer our clients to get help (and hopefully in the process, prevent other families from having to go through this tragic loss).

This year, we have succeeded in our goal to increase engagement opportunities for community members in a voluntary capacity either through voluntary income management or voluntary case plan agreements. We have found that clients have more self-determination (personal agency) and motivation to change when their engagement is voluntary rather than a mandated order. In the coming year, we will continue to build our capacity to assist clients to implement positive behaviour change, especially through voluntary engagement, for clients who are motivated to take personal responsibility for their own families and community.

Although there continues to be uncertainty around what the future holds for the FRC, we will nevertheless proceed with continued determination to support our clients in the best way we can. Despite the uncertainty, we feel encouraged following our participation and input into the new FRC Strategic Plan 2023-27 to be implemented on 1 July 2023 which is focussing on planning our future objectives and strategies for the next four years.