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Queensland Government Progress Report

on implementation of the Government Response to the Palm Island Select Committee

November 2006



Queensland
Government



**Queensland
Government**

**Premier of Queensland
and Minister for Trade**

PREMIERS FOREWORD

In November 2005 my Government gave a long term commitment to improve conditions for the community on Palm Island. This report outlines the progress that has been made in implementing that commitment.

An alcohol management plan commenced in June this year and a Community Justice Group has been established. My Government provided \$600,000 for a range of initiatives to provide people with alternatives to alcohol and assistance in dealing with its impacts. Three alcohol, tobacco and other drug workers are now based on the island and are assisting in the provision of treatment to people with alcohol and drug related problems. These workers also provide education and counselling through local community groups.

Under the Community Governance Improvement Strategy, the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council is implementing a four year Performance Development Improvement Plan. A Land Use Plan has recently been endorsed by the Council and will assist it to plan for housing and infrastructure.

Palm Island's future lies with its young people. There were over 10 000 visits to the Palm Island Community and Youth Centre in September and it continues to be used by a wide range of community groups. Preparatory Year commenced on Palm Island in 2006. There will be a greater focus on early literacy skills by enhancing early childhood education services.

Work is progressing to improve transport for the people of Palm Island. Cheaper ferry services will be available to Palm Island residents from 13 December 2006 and an extra daily service will also commence from this date. Construction on the upgrade to the airport is also imminent.

There is still more to be done. I am committed to working with the community to complete the significant task that we set ourselves 12 months ago. This is why I have asked the newly-appointed Government Coordinator, Indigenous Service Delivery to take responsibility for driving implementation of the Government's commitments to Palm Island. She will oversee a Palm Island Partnerships Action Group and be accountable to Government for progress.

With co-operation and commitment on all sides, we will ensure a better way of life for the people of Palm Island.

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Glossary of frequently used terms

ALA	<i>Aboriginal Land Act 1991</i>
ATODS	Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drugs Services
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects
CGIS	Community Governance Improvement Strategy
Council	Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council
CTP	Councillor Training Program
DOGIT	Deed-of-Grant-in-Trust
GBRMPA	Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
PDP	Performance Development Plan
QATSIP	Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Police project
QPCYWA	Queensland Police Citizens Youth Welfare Association

Recommendation 1

The following key principles should underlie governments' future dealings with the Palm Island Council and community:

- cultural respect;
- recognising the impact of unresolved trauma;
- community engagement;
- building community capacity;
- shared responsibility and partnerships; and
- an integrated and coordinated approach to service delivery.

These principles underlie the Committee's approach to its inquiry and the recommendations in this report. Some aspects of these key principles also require commitment on behalf of the Palm Island Council and community.

These principles continue to underpin the Government's dealings with the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council (Council) and community and are reflective of the Government's broader commitment to establishing a better way of doing business with Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Central to that commitment is partnering with communities to devise local solutions to community priorities. On Palm Island the Government is working with the community through a number of different community engagement mechanisms. These include project-specific mechanisms to support community involvement in the design and delivery of specific services – such as the new Family Support Hub and alcohol demand initiatives – as well as more general mechanisms that allow the community to raise issues of concern and input into broader Government processes. The Future Directions Group is an example of how these broader mechanisms are working (see Recommendation 3).

The Government Coordination Centre and the Government Champions continue to work with the Council and the community to ensure that issues of community concern are articulated within Government and to improve agencies' understanding of the community's needs. While it is not always possible to address all of those issues in the short to medium term, the Government remains committed to maintaining and strengthening a collaborative relationship with the community and its representative structures. A key component of that commitment includes working with the Council through the Community Governance Improvement Strategy (CGIS) to develop local governance and leadership capacity.

It also includes better integration and coordination of government service delivery. At the local level, the Government has entered into an agreement with the Council to improve housing services. At the Federal level, the Government continues to work with the Commonwealth Government to coordinate programs and services through the Palm Island Partnerships strategy as well as on specific initiatives, such as the Safe Haven project.

Recommendation 2

The Palm Island Council and its senior administrative staff continue to require advice and assistance to strengthen leadership and governance capacity. In this regard, the Committee endorses:

- the assistance being provided under the Community Governance Improvement Strategy through which the Council is required to develop and implement a Performance Development Plan and the specific improvement projects it details for the short, medium and long term; and
- other initiatives which build leadership and governance capacity in the community.

In turn, a commitment from the Council to undertake the training and other opportunities made available is required. The Minister for Local Government should monitor the progress made by the Council through these various strategies and provide any further appropriate support that is required.

Providing the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council and its senior staff with the advice and tools required to strengthen leadership and governance capacity on the island is a key long-term commitment of the Government.

As part of the CGIS the Council is continuing to implement a four-year Performance Development Plan (PDP) that identifies the steps needed to achieve best corporate practice. Key outcomes to date include: an improved organisational structure; new human resource policies and procedures, including a staff training plan and a code of conduct; improved financial and administrative performance; and revised business systems and procedures. Training programs for councillors and senior staff have also been put in place (see Recommendation 5).

To assist with implementation of the PDP and to ensure its ongoing relevance, the Government has engaged consultants to work directly with the Council to address a range of governance and leadership issues. In addition, the Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation meets with the Council regularly to work through emergent issues and has also convened two workshops in Townsville to address priority issues for Council.

Recommendation 3

The resource officer to be appointed by the Queensland Government to assist the Palm Island Council enhance its capacity to effectively engage and negotiate with Government should, at the completion of his/her term, prepare a handover report for the Council. This report should canvass: issues identified by the officer; strategies recommended to address those issues; implementation of those strategies by the Council (and any outcomes); and other observations and recommendations for improved engagement and negotiation between the Council and Government. A copy of this report should also be provided to the Premier for tabling in the Legislative Assembly.

The Resource Officer, Mr Scott McDougall, was nominated by Council and appointed in September 2005. His report, *Palm Island: Future Directions*, was tabled in Parliament by the Honourable John Mickel MP, then Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, on 21 April 2006.

The report confirmed many of the issues which had been highlighted in the Palm Island Parliamentary Select Committee report and supported many of the actions outlined in the Government's Five Point Plan for Palm Island. Key recommendations are being addressed through the Government's existing commitments to Palm Island.

The Government is providing support to maintain the Future Directions Group, which was initially established by the Council to support the work of Mr McDougall. The group, which meets on a monthly basis, provides a valuable forum for community members to discuss issues and has proven to be an effective method for the Government and the community to address issues. The initiative has received widespread community support and provides an ongoing means to facilitate effective community engagement and Government consultation.

The Government Coordination Centre provides staff to support the work of the group, in addition to meeting the costs of catering and venue hire.

Recommendation 4

The management consultants assigned to the Palm Island Council under the Community Governance Improvement Strategy should assist the Council identify and pursue opportunities for assistance and information sharing between experienced representatives and officers from other community governments and appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

The Chief Executive Officer and councillors from the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council met with the Mareeba Shire Council in October 2006 to seek assistance and share information in relation to the conduct of council meetings and other administrative matters, including financial computer systems.

Representatives of the Council are intending to meet with their counterparts from Thuringowa Shire Council in December 2006 to discuss opportunities for assistance and information sharing between the two councils.

In addition, the Government arranged for the Deputy Chief Executive of the Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council to work with the Council for a three month period commencing in September 2006.

More broadly, the recent state-wide CGIS conference in Cairns provided a valuable opportunity for the Council to develop broader networks across a number of local governments. The Government plans to make the conference an annual event as it

provides an important opportunity for local governments to share information and to develop formal and informal networks.

Recommendation 5

The Minister for Local Government should ensure that programs are in place on Palm Island to:

- assist prospective Councillors understand the roles and responsibilities of Councillors; and
- provide new Councillors with an appropriate induction package.

The Government will hold information sessions prior to the next local government election on Palm Island in 2008 to build the capacity of community residents who may be considering running for office. Once in office, new councillors will be provided with support and training on their roles and responsibilities.

Under the CGIS, a Councillor Training Program (CTP) is provided to incumbent councillors and senior staff. The CTP delivers accredited onsite training enabling councillors and senior staff to obtain a Certificate IV in Local Government Administration. All current councillors are participating in the CTP. It provides a comprehensive training package, including modules on roles and responsibilities, financial management, budget management and policy development.

In addition, a new Registered Training Organisation, *Natural Partners*, has developed a tailored training program for the Council. *Natural Partners* delivered two training modules on roles, responsibilities and budgeting in May 2006 and a further module, requested by the Council, on financial management and strategic planning was delivered in September 2006.

The Government also recognises the importance of effective succession planning for senior Council staff and has funded the Deputy Chief Executive Officer to complete the diploma course in Local Government Administration offered by the Local Government Association of Queensland. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer is the first graduate of the course from an Indigenous council.

Recommendation 6

The Minister for Local Government, in consultation with the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, should examine the need to appoint a financial controller for the Palm Island Council under the Local Government (Community Government Areas) Act 1984 (Qld) once the Auditor-General's audit of the Palm Island Council's 2004-05 financial statements is complete. Apart from issues raised in that audit report, other factors the Minister should take into account in making this assessment are:

- the views of the Council and senior administrative staff;
- the role that the financial controller would perform vis a vis the management consultants assigned to the Palm Island Council under the Community Governance Improvement Strategy;
- stability in the Council's Chief Executive Officer position;
- any observations made by the resource officer to be appointed by the Queensland Government in that officer's handover report (see section 3.2.1); and
- any recommendations resulting from the review proposed in recommendation 7.

The Government has assisted the Council to engage a suitably qualified Chief Executive Officer.

Having qualified senior managers in the key positions of Chief Executive Officer, Deputy Chief Executive Officer and Accountant has provided the Council with a level of administrative stability that has, in turn, delivered improved administrative and financial controls. Given these significant improvements, the appointment of a financial controller for the Council is not considered necessary at this time.

Recommendation 7

The Minister for Local Government should undertake, as a matter of priority and in conjunction with other relevant agencies, a review of the following matters in relation to community governments:

- the level of detailed reporting required and whether this can be minimised without compromising accountability;
- the desirability of introducing a 'service provider' model; and
- the current system of grant acquittals and whether this can be rationalised to reduce complexity without compromising accountability.

The *Local Government (Community Government Areas) Finance Standard 2004* already provides that Indigenous local governments are subject to a different standard of reporting than that required of non-Indigenous local governments.

However, in recognition that reporting and acquittal requirements remain a significant issue for many Indigenous local governments, the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments are jointly considering how to further rationalise these requirements. As a specific initiative under the *Bilateral Agreement on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander*

Service Delivery, a “Red Tape Reduction” pilot project is being developed in Lockhart River.

Project design for the pilot has been completed and an external contractor engaged to assist with identifying innovative approaches that will reduce complexity and unnecessary compliance obligations without compromising accountability.

It is anticipated that reform proposals will be finalised in early to mid-2007.

In addition, as part of the CGIS, the Queensland Government will consider the option of an off-site accounting and financial management bureau service to assist Indigenous councils meet current acquittal and reporting obligations.

Recommendation 8

The management consultants assigned to the Palm Island Council under the Community Governance Improvement Strategy should assist the Palm Island Council examine:

- ways by which the Council can rationalise the services it provides so as to enable the Council to concentrate on the provision of core municipal services;
- appropriate alternative service delivery vehicles, particularly for the provision of non-core municipal services; and
- shared service provision arrangements with other local and community governments which might, in particular, enhance the Council’s provision of core municipal services.

However, it is important that the Council devolve service provision to entities which have the capacity to deliver the relevant service and appropriate governance and financial accountability capacity. Further, key issues which need to be addressed in negotiating and documenting any service provision arrangements include: the scope, terms and conditions of the arrangements; decision-making responsibilities, processes and timeframes; and payment of costs and fees. State Government Financial Assistance funding should be directly earmarked for, and provided to, relevant entities under such arrangements.

The Council has the authority to decide what non-core responsibilities it wishes to divest. While operation of the retail store is currently subject to a divestment process (see Recommendation 12), the Council has indicated that it wishes to retain responsibility for the service station, the bank and the canteen (see Recommendation 10).

The Government’s policy under the CGIS has been to encourage councils to improve the delivery of municipal services as a priority. In that process, councils are assisted to examine their other operations and functions, including enterprises, to determine if these should be retained or divested. This is a complex process and one in which the lack of suitable alternative operators has been a key barrier to divestment, particularly in circumstances where an activity, such as the provision of banking facilities, is undertaken as a community service obligation.

Where councils choose to retain businesses, the Government is providing assistance under the CGIS to manage and improve the practices associated with these operations.

See also Recommendation 10.

Recommendation 9

In order for the Palm Island Council to be able to devolve non-core municipal functions to other entities within the Palm Island community, the Queensland Government needs to ensure that appropriate assistance and support is provided to the community to enhance non-government organisations' service delivery capability. The Committee acknowledges that the Palm Island Partnerships strategy is designed to address the critical deficiencies in the capacity of the non-government sector on Palm Island and to deliver services normally funded through that sector. The Committee supports the objectives behind this strategy. However, it is imperative that:

- the development of any such strategy (including the entity under the strategy) occurs in consultation with the Palm Island Council and community;
- any entity formed as part of the strategy includes community representation; and
- a genuine attempt to build capacity in the community through activities such as transferring skills, mentoring and training underpins the strategy.

The Queensland Government will continue to work with the Commonwealth Government under the Palm Island Partnerships strategy to deliver quality and reliable services to the community including: establishing an organisation capable of filling gaps in local service delivery; engaging with and training local people; and building local capabilities in leadership, governance and administration.

In that context, the Government remains firmly committed to ensuring community involvement in the design, governance and functions of the Palm Island Community Services Organisation currently being developed under the Palm Island Partnerships strategy.

The Government commenced negotiations with the community and the Council on the proposed model for the organisation and the potential services that it could deliver in May 2006. A range of formal and informal meetings with groups and individuals on Palm Island have since been held.

Consultations to date have identified a range of potential functions for the organisation including: the delivery of human services - such as Safe Haven, Family Support Hub and disability respite services - and the provision of corporate support to non-government organisations. The corporate support function will benefit existing and future service providers on Palm Island through the provision of streamlined financial and administrative support. The proposed structure of the organisation includes community, Council and Government representation.

Subject to final consideration of the model by Government, the Palm Island Community Services Organisation is expected to be established in early 2007.

Recommendation 10

The management consultants assigned to the Palm Island Council under the Community Governance Improvement Strategy should work with the Palm Island Council to, as matter of priority:

- rationalise costs relating to its service provision;
- address its significant debtors problem, especially Councillors' debt;
- separately account for the motel as an enterprise; and
- divest the Council of enterprises.

Any tender processes relating to the divestment of enterprises must be conducted in a fair and open manner, and the Council should use its best endeavours to encourage, facilitate and support any enterprises taking over a particular service.

The Council is currently operating within its budget. In line with good corporate practice, it is presently undertaking a review of its operations and structure to ensure that its budget, human resources and operational needs are properly aligned. The motel is separately accounted for to better track its performance.

The Council has also made good progress in addressing its debtors problem, including councillors' debts. The Chief Executive Officer has appointed a debt management officer and there has been significant early success with approximately sixty debtors being signed on to wage deductions to reduce outstanding arrears.

The Council's decision to retain a number of enterprises is addressed under Recommendation 8. In relation to those enterprises, the operations of the service station have been restructured, resulting in improved profitability, and the Council is currently considering upgrades to the physical infrastructure. Similarly, the Council is currently considering whether to install a new electronic financial tracking system in the bank.

Recommendation 11

The Committee does not support the Palm Island Council being amalgamated with another local government. Practically, the Committee believes it would be extremely difficult to meet the legislative requirements for this to occur. Moreover, the option is contrary to principles of self-determination and the notion of building capacity in the community. If, at some later stage, it is considered that some form of amalgamation is necessary or desirable then the relevant Minister should review the applicable legislation regarding the requirements for an amalgamation, taking into account the practical difficulties that might be encountered in meeting current legislative requirements and considering principles of self-determination.

The Government is committed to working with the Council to support good administration. Through the CGIS, the Government is providing support to the Council to improve its capacity to manage its own affairs.

Recommendation 12

The Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy should pursue transferring ownership and management of the Palm Island retail store from Government to an entity capable of demonstrating appropriate capacity, pricing policies, product selection, local employment policies and profit investment. In this regard, the Minister should examine the structure under which the Yarrabah retail store is owned and managed.

In April 2006 the Government decided to divest all six of its retail stores, including the store on Palm Island. The divestment strategy involves transferring the store building and land to the Council and engaging an independent business to operate the store. This strategy provides the Council with an income from the commercial lease fee without it incurring the business operating risks. The Council will maintain ongoing control of the business lease and be able to exercise significant control over the policies of the business to ensure that the long-term needs of the community are met.

The Government has provided the Council with an indicative lease figure and historical trading information. The retailing business will be offered to the open market under lease conditions agreed by the Council and the Minister for Communities, Disability Services, Seniors and Youth. Meetings have been held with the Council and lease conditions are under development. It is proposed that the conditions will cover nutrition, product range, pricing, employment and training matters as well as standard commercial terms.

Recommendation 13

The Council should seek the advice and assistance of:

- other local governments in exploring options to address animal control problems; and
- the Government Champions for Palm Island in resolving the difficulties with the three-phase power connection to the Council workshop and the prospects of alternative power sources.

Under its Environmental Health Worker Program, the Government is providing annual funding to the Council for an environmental health worker to address ongoing animal control issues. The Government has also assisted the Council to establish local laws to address animal control issues. The laws are currently in the process of being gazetted.

The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries continues to monitor animal welfare issues on Palm Island through a network of organisations and provides a range of support and advice to the Council and community members. The Council is consulting with the RSPCA on dog control and micro-chipping options.

The Council has advised Government that there is no impediment to the connection of three-phase power to the Council workshop.

As regards alternative power sources, discussions have taken place with the supply

authority who recommend against the use of alternate systems where mains supply is available. All suggested areas for future development as detailed in the Palm Island Land Use Plan are capable of being serviced from the existing reticulation network.

Recommendation 14

The Minister for Natural Resources and Mines should pursue, in consultation with relevant communities, a rationalisation of land tenure in DOGIT communities resulting in a form of 'Aboriginal freehold' tenure in township areas. This form of tenure should enable councils to grant long-term leases, say to a maximum of 50 years, via less complex approval processes than currently exist for trustee leases. The granting of longer term leases may, in turn, facilitate home ownership and economic development. To expedite this process of tenure rationalisation, the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines should investigate the possibility of enabling development to proceed once an ILUA has been signed but before registration. Any such tenure rationalisation will need to be accompanied by structures and transparent and formal policies which ensure a fair and independent process to govern decisions for the granting of leases.

The Government is currently reviewing the *Aboriginal Land Act 1991 (ALA)*. The review gives consideration to Recommendation 14 by proposing 99 year home ownership leases, 30 year commercial leases and a range of other measures for more streamlined leasing processes.

A White Paper will be released in the near future, after which there will be a period for stakeholders to comment on the proposed amendments. The review of the ALA is expected to be completed in mid-2007.

In addition to the ALA review, the Government is also considering other measures to address tenure-related issues in Deed-of-Grant-in-Trust (DOGIT) communities. These include long-term projects to simplify and modernise the complex tenure arrangements that presently exist in these communities, in addition to short-term measures to address barriers to the delivery of critical infrastructure and essential services.

Recommendation 15

The Minister for Public Works should ensure that the current process to develop a land use plan for Palm Island, in consultation with the Palm Island Council and community, is progressed as efficiently and expeditiously as possible.

The Government has consulted extensively with the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council, the Palm Island community and the traditional owners of Palm Island, the Manbarra people, in the development of a land use plan for the island. A plan was presented to the Council in November 2005. Subject to some minor amendments, the plan was subsequently adopted by the Council in October 2006.

The plan aims to assist the Council to make informed decisions about the location of future development, including housing and capital works on the island. It is designed to support the development of Palm Island into a sustainable community, which takes account of social, cultural, economic and environmental issues in the community's growth.

The Government is providing ongoing support to the Council to encourage the take-up and implementation of the Plan. This will include providing the Council with access to a qualified town planner to support future land use planning and its inclusion in the development of the Council's corporate plan for 2007-08.

In recognition that the plan will only be effective if adhered to by all stakeholders, Government departments were recently briefed on the role of the plan through the North Queensland Regional Managers' Coordination Network.

Recommendation 16

The Government Champions for Palm Island, on behalf of the Queensland Government, and the Palm Island Council should immediately negotiate a lease agreement for the Palm Island Community Youth Centre site.

A lease has still to be executed for the Palm Island Community and Youth Centre (Centre) and negotiations are ongoing around this issue.

Lease negotiations are currently centred on the involvement of the Queensland Police Citizens Youth Welfare Association (QPCYWA) in the management of the Centre. While the Council has indicated a preference for the removal of the QPCYWA from the Centre's management structure as a condition of it executing a lease, the Government remains committed to the QPCYWA's continued involvement.

In recent months, the QPCYWA has significantly increased usage of the Centre, with over 10,000 users of the facility during September 2006. The QPCYWA has also demonstrated its capacity to manage this important community resource, which provides a range of activities including: after school care, sports programs, discos, old time dancing and PULSE youth activities. The Centre is also used by other organisations to conduct their own activities. The Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE regularly uses the Centre's commercial kitchen to conduct hospitality training for students, while other users include the Council, the North Queensland Cowboys, the Australian Red Cross and local churches.

The Government has suggested a number of measures to alleviate the Council's concerns about continued QPCYWA involvement in the management of the Centre. These include: the QPCYWA undertaking to make any necessary changes to address the Council's reasonable concerns; ensuring the management committee for the Centre includes two Council members, community members and a representative from the Department of Communities; and broadening the range of services and demographic reach of the Centre.

The Government remains committed to resolving this issue in consultation with all stakeholders.

Recommendation 17

Immediately following the release of the final draft land use plan in September 2005, the Queensland Government should negotiate with the Council the granting of leases for critical government infrastructure on Palm Island. (See also section 4.6 in this regard.)

The successful placement of additional Government infrastructure is central to the Government's ability to provide increased services to the Palm Island community. Lease negotiations are continuing with the Council to support the placement of critical infrastructure, including:

- Securing a lease for a Government Office Building on lot 74;
- Management Agreement for the Palm Island Community and Youth Centre and lease for the land (Recommendations 16 and 43);
- Agreement regarding the site and lease for the Emergency Services Facility; and
- Finalisation of the Coolgaree Building lease.

These negotiations are being actively pursued by the Government Champions. However, progress has been delayed pending resolution of other matters, including management arrangements for the Palm Island Community and Youth Centre (see Recommendation 16) and issues relating to deductions from State Government Financial Aid payments (see Recommendation 18).

The Government is committed to resolving these issues and will continue to work with the Council to negotiate an agreement. More broadly, the Government has also indicated to the Council its commitment to jointly develop a clear set of guidelines and procedures to support future lease negotiations on Government infrastructure.

Recommendation 18

That proportion of reductions in the monthly State Government Financial Aid payments to the Council relating to the administrator's fees (see section 3.1.3) should cease immediately upon the Council doing all things necessary (including passing relevant resolutions and executing relevant documentation) to:

- secure a lease to the Queensland Government for the Palm Island Community Youth Centre site; and
- enable critical government infrastructure to proceed.

To facilitate this, the Government Champions should document with the Council:

- the leases required immediately for critical government infrastructure; and
- the steps required of the Council to enable critical government infrastructure to proceed.

In line with the recommendation of the Select Committee, the Government will cease deductions from State Government Financial Aid payments to the Council as soon as a lease is secured for the Palm Island Community and Youth Centre site and the Council takes the necessary steps to enable critical government infrastructure to proceed.

The Government's position on this issue has been clearly communicated to the Council by the Government Champions and advice provided on the steps required to resolve this issue.

The Government remains committed to this recommendation and will continue to work with the Council to negotiate an agreement.

Recommendation 19

The Committee supports the current work by the Queensland Indigenous Working Group to develop a template Indigenous Land Use Agreement to assist in resolving native title issues in DOGIT communities and, pending that, specific 'infrastructure' ILUAs with appropriate parties. In the meantime, once the land use plan for Palm Island is finalised, priority must be given to negotiating ILUAs regarding:

- critical government infrastructure; and
- identified housing sites given the critical nature of housing on the island.

The Government has conducted native title investigations over several sites required for critical government infrastructure. The investigations indicate that native title is unlikely to impede the grant of leases for infrastructure in the "community area".

However, the Government remains committed to negotiating Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) wherever necessary and has secured the services of the Queensland Indigenous Working Group (QIWG) to assist in this process.

More broadly, the Government and QIWG are involved in ongoing discussions with a number of Indigenous Councils, including the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council, to develop ILUAs that would assist critical infrastructure development on DOGIT communities.

Recommendation 20

To assist in the more coordinated and efficient negotiation of leases for government infrastructure on Palm Island, the Queensland Government should:

- identify a central point through which all negotiations for government infrastructure leases on Palm Island occur; and
- formulate, in conjunction with the Council, standard lease terms and conditions for leases relating to government infrastructure and a consistent policy regarding rental under such leases.

The Department of Public Works has been assigned responsibility for negotiating all Government infrastructure leases for Palm Island.

The Government has also developed draft standard lease terms and conditions, including a rental model, for new Government leases in DOGIT communities.

Subject to approval by the Government's Property Management Committee, the Government will consult on the proposals with Aboriginal local governments, including the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council, from January to April 2007. Consultation with Torres Strait Islander local governments will occur from May to July 2007.

Recommendation 21

The Minister for Natural Resources and Mines should review provisions of the *Land Act 1994* regarding rent to be charged under trustee leases to establish whether statutory amendment or some form of non-statutory guidance is required regarding appropriate rent levels to be charged by councils where government infrastructure is providing a critical service to the community.

As noted against Recommendation 20, the Government has developed draft standard lease terms and conditions, including a rental model, for new Government leases in DOGIT communities. This has involved consideration of the provisions of the *Land Act 1994*.

Subject to approval by the Government's Property Management Committee, the Government will consult on the proposals with Aboriginal local governments, including the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council, from January to April 2007. Consultation with Torres Strait Islander local governments will occur from May to July 2007.

Recommendation 22

The management consultants assigned to the Palm Island Council under the Community Governance Improvement Strategy should assist the Palm Island Council to:

- formalise the various tenancies on the Island which are currently not subject to formal agreement;
- develop policies to ensure that non-government tenancies are based on standard terms and conditions, and rent calculation basis; and
- establish and maintain a register of all leases granted and attend to any registration requirements as soon as practicable.

The Government is assisting the Council to develop a register of non-government leases. Prerequisites for the compilation of a register include setting the regulatory fee structure for leases and obtaining legal expertise to develop appropriate leasing instruments for the various categories of tenant.

The Government has provided the Council with assistance to develop the regulatory fee structure, which is expected to be adopted by Council before the end of the year. As part of the CGIS, funding has also been made available to the Council to obtain the necessary legal assistance to complete the issuing of leases.

It is anticipated that all leases will be issued and the register in place by January 2007.

Recommendation 23

The Minister for Housing should negotiate with appropriate federal counterparts the delivery of Commonwealth funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing by the State.

The Government remains committed to reaching agreement with the Commonwealth Government on ways to streamline and improve the delivery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing.

Both governments have endorsed the *Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Agreement (excluding the Torres Strait Region) 2005-08*, which seeks to achieve better coordination of Indigenous housing and infrastructure programs in Queensland. The agreement proposes the transfer of resources and service delivery responsibility for the Community Housing and Infrastructure Program from the Commonwealth Government to the Queensland Government.

An assessment of the program is currently being undertaken. The assessment will be finalised by June 2007 and will provide the basis of future resource negotiations in relation to the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement. Those negotiations will commence in mid 2007.

Recommendation 24

The Palm Island Council should not be responsible for housing (both capital delivery and housing management) on Palm Island. The Minister for Housing should pursue with the Council an alternative housing delivery model as a matter of priority. This model should:

- address both aspects of housing delivery, that is, capital delivery and housing management;
- be independent from the Council;
- incorporate mechanisms for Council and community consultation regarding factors such as housing location, design and planning;
- ensure proper planning so that housing being constructed matches the demographics of the Island and examine other ways to address the housing shortage;
- deliver transparent decision-making regarding housing allocation which is based on a fair process and which is subject to independent scrutiny; and
- aim to maximise community employment in housing construction, upgrades and maintenance, and build the capacity of the community by providing associated training and skills development.

Improving the housing situation on Palm Island remains a key Government commitment. As an essential first step in that process, the Government has completed an extensive exercise to better quantify housing needs on the island. The Government has also worked with the Council to develop a Housing Improvement Plan. That plan was endorsed by the Council in June 2006 and will form the basis for future housing services on the island.

Under the Housing Improvement Plan, the Council has retained responsibility for construction and tenancy management and has signed a new funding agreement to comply with more rigorous tenancy and property management policies. The Government has assumed responsibility for maintenance and continues to assist the Council to plan for capital works and to develop suitable tenant and property management policies. In this context, the Government has committed funding to provide support in establishing and supporting tenancy participation groups on the island.

As part of efforts to improve existing housing stock, a \$500,000 maintenance program was completed in June 2006, with a further \$2.3 million allocated for the 2006-2007 financial year. Funding has also been allocated to build accommodation for people aged 45 years and over and to improve residents' options for housing choice on the mainland. Construction has commenced on six new houses. Major upgrades have commenced on four existing properties, with a further six scheduled.

The Government remains committed to maximising community employment in the delivery of housing services and has funded QBuild to employ 10 construction apprentices. There are currently six construction apprentices working for QBuild on the island. See also Recommendations 26 and 27.

Community capacity is being developed through enterprise arrangements between the Government, the Coolgaree CDEP and local Townsville industry manufacturers (see Recommendation 27).

Recommendation 25
The Minister for Housing should continue to pursue economic models through which home ownership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities can be achieved. This modelling should be undertaken in close consultation with those communities and in light of relevant land tenure reform.

The Government remains committed to pursuing models through which home ownership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities can be achieved.

A review of the ALA is currently being finalised (see Recommendation 14). Subject to the outcomes of that review and the final form of land tenure arrangements, further work will be undertaken to develop viable home ownership options.

Recommendation 26

The Minister for Public Works should continue to pursue:

- apprenticeship programs on Palm Island (see also sections 5.2 and 5.3);
- construction timetabling on Palm Island which maximises the likelihood of securing contractors and local employment opportunities; and
- alternative residential building options.

The Government continues to directly provide apprenticeship and employment opportunities through its capital works program on the island. It also undertakes a supervisory role in relation to apprentices and tradesmen employed by the Council.

The Government is committed to maximising community employment on the island through the provision of direct employment and training opportunities wherever possible. For example, plans to build accommodation for people aged 45 years and over (see Recommendation 24) will include training and employment opportunities for local people in construction and landscaping. The Government is also working to better align training and employment opportunities, in addition to encouraging the uptake of existing training and apprenticeship positions. See also Recommendations 35, 37 and 39.

Construction is also timetabled to maximise community employment. Upcoming work opportunities are discussed with the Council each month to ensure that any opportunity for employment is given to local people. Should the current barriers to progressing critical infrastructure projects be resolved, these meetings will become an important mechanism for optimising local employment and training in the Government's capital works program.

As part of a larger Government pilot, a range of different building options are currently being trialled on Palm Island including a light weight fibre cement sheeted concrete panel system; polyurethane core filled fibre cement based panel system; and a factory produced modular transportable building. The Government will evaluate these options for their ability to provide local employment opportunities and their cost effectiveness. See further Recommendation 27.

Recommendation 27

The Minister for Public Works should examine ways in which construction costs on the Island might be reduced by using locally sourced materials and alternative freight arrangements.

As discussed at Recommendation 26, the Government is currently trialling alternative building options on Palm Island. In addition, the Government has formed a working group, including industry stakeholders and the Coolgaree CDEP, to examine options to reduce construction and maintenance costs. To date this has resulted in the establishment of local enterprises to provide trade services such as joinery, glazing, security and fly screens, pest control, tree lopping and a mechanical workshop.

As a result of enterprise arrangements between the Government, the Coolgaree CDEP and local Townsville industry manufacturers island residents are currently being trained in Townsville to make windows and kitchen and bathroom cabinets. Once trained, these workers will return permanently to the island and work from the Coolgaree CDEP workshop. The windows and cabinets will be flat-packed, shipped in bulk to Palm Island, assembled on the island and then installed by locally trained labour. As local skills and capacity develop, it is anticipated that increased manufacturing will occur on the island.

This initiative has created eight new employment positions on Palm Island. It has also resulted in estimated cost savings of between 10 to 15 percent.

Recommendation 28

The Palm Island Council should pursue with the Government Champions for Palm Island issues regarding the current Council chambers and offices once the land use plan is finalised.

The Council has indicated that it is not presently seeking new chambers but does require minor improvements to security measures and to the current reception area. The Government will assist the Council by providing advice on how it can best address these matters.

Recommendation 29

The Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy should assist the trustees of the Bwgaman Aboriginal Land Trust to, as a matter of priority, develop an appropriate master plan to effectively utilise the land held by that trust at Aitkenvale, Townsville, in accordance with the purposes of the trust and in light of the need to fund, manage and maintain any improvements to the land.

At a recent meeting between the Bwgaman Aboriginal Land Trust and the Government, the Trust advised that it is considering options for the redevelopment of the land with the assistance of a Sydney based law firm who are acting on a pro bono basis. The Trust indicated that it is not seeking Government's assistance for this task at this time.

The Government-run Aitkenvale Hostel is located on Trust land. The Government has had discussions with the Trust over the future of the hostel and indicated its intention to close and demolish the facility due to its poor condition. The Government has assessed the housing needs of residents of the Aitkenvale Hostel. Two families have been transferred to public housing properties in Townsville. The remaining households are being assisted into more appropriate longer term housing.

Recommendation 30

The Minister for Education should examine:

- the effects on Palm Island of the changes to the Commonwealth's Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program and examine, in conjunction with the school community and appropriate federal counterparts (if necessary), ways in which these effects can be minimised;
- the reasons for, and effects of, Palm Island not qualifying for the Commonwealth's Priority Country Area program funding, in conjunction with the school community and the federal counterparts (if necessary), and take appropriate action;
- the adequacy of resources on Palm Island to cater for students with special needs or learning difficulties; and
- programs which could better facilitate students learning in standard Australian English but at the same time not at the expense of their Aboriginal English.

Both the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness program (ASSPA) and the Priority Country Area program (PCAP) are Commonwealth initiatives. A recent review of PCAP criteria has reconfirmed Palm Island's ineligibility to access this funding source.

To minimise the impact of changes to these Commonwealth programs, the State and Commonwealth governments have worked together to assist the Bwgcolman school community secure alternative Commonwealth funding for three projects: Strengthening linkages between parents, community and school (\$50,000); Building pathways to the future - Stage 1 (\$15,000); and Building pathways to the future - Stage 2 (\$160,000).

The Government continues to work with relevant education, health and community stakeholders to support and coordinate the continued provision of specialist programs for students with special needs and learning disabilities at the Bwgcolman Community School and St Michael's Catholic School. This includes specialist staff from Townsville providing services for individual students with a disability.

A reading recovery teacher and two learning support teachers assist students with learning difficulties at Bwgcolman Community School. In addition, an Indigenous education assistant is allocated to each classroom to work in partnership with teachers. These employees provide a vital link with the community, promote cultural understanding and support teacher-student interactions.

To support students who speak Aboriginal English at home, all primary teachers and Indigenous education workers undertook training in the Walking Talking Text program in 2006. This is a specialist program designed to help students develop an awareness of the differences between Aboriginal English and standard Australian English and to develop their skills in "school language" without foregoing their "home language".

Recommendation 31

The Committee does not support Years 11 and 12 being offered on Palm Island at this stage. However, the Minister for Education should:

- examine the nature and scope of schooling available to secondary students on the Island, particularly in light of the Government's Education and Training Reforms for the Future; and
- assess the sufficiency of funding under the Federal Government's Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme for young people from the Island to attend school on the mainland and make any necessary representations to federal counterparts and agencies.

The proposed School of Distance Education trial for the delivery of Year 11 and 12 courses on Palm Island did not proceed for a variety of reasons, including a community preference for locally-delivered senior schooling rather than distance education.

The Government subsequently commissioned a report on options for developing an integrated model for the delivery of education and training to young people on Palm Island. Options currently under active consideration include the development of an education precinct that integrates education and training on Palm and the feasibility of delivering post Year 10 programs to young people on the island. As the current school site is not suitable for further development, alternative sites are being assessed. The Government recognises that this is a critical issue for Palm Island residents and anticipates consulting with the community on a way forward during 2007.

To better assist those senior students who continue their education on the mainland, the Government will be trialling a new homestay program in 2007. Kirwan State High School in Townsville is one of seven high performing state high schools on the eastern seaboard that are part of this pilot, under which students will be able to live with a local family in homestay accommodation. Palm Island students have been encouraged to apply for the homestay program. Students from the Bwgcolman Community School are able to access financial assistance to study away from home under the Government's Living Away From Home Allowances Scheme. A range of Commonwealth funding is available to assist with making mainland education more accessible.

The Government also provides assistance to households wishing to relocate to the mainland to be closer to education or health services. Four households have been allocated accommodation in Townsville and a further three households have been listed for priority allocation. The Government is also developing options to support households in public or private housing on the mainland to sustain their tenancies.

Recommendation 32

The Palm Island community, led by education providers on the Island, should examine locally-based solutions to address continuing problems of truancy by students. Advice and assistance should be sought of leaders in other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities which have considered the same problem. The Minister for Education should put in place mechanisms to monitor school attendance rates and the impact of the community's efforts to address this problem.

The Government recognises that contributing factors to poor school attendance are complex and varied and include: the value placed on education by the child's family and community; the influence of the child's friends and peers; and the ability of schools to foster good relations with children and their communities.

The Government is working with an alliance of Aboriginal community schools, including the Bwgcolman Community School, to improve Indigenous students' attendance and retention rates utilising *Parent School Partnerships Initiative* funding to develop and implement local solutions. As discussed under Recommendation 30, the Bwgcolman Community School has been successful in securing funding from this program for an initiative to strengthen linkages between parents, community and school. This will support programs to reduce truancy by building community and parent ownership and involvement in the school.

Other initiatives on the island include an innovative program linking students with the North Queensland Cowboys rugby league team. Members of the team visit the Bwgcolman Community School to conduct activities with students each term. Students with regular attendance at school are rewarded with a visit to the clubhouse and a Cowboys' game. The program has been successful in improving attendance rates.

The Breakfast Club funded by Red Cross plays an additional part in encouraging students to come to school. The school is also planning to provide a re-entry program for young people who have been out of the school system for extended periods of time.

The Government is closely monitoring school attendance rates across all Queensland state primary schools in 2006 and this baseline data will enable targets to be set for each school in 2007.

Recommendation 33

The Minister for Education should:

- examine the arrangements for early childhood (pre-preparatory) education on Palm Island, scope for improvement and strategies for greater participation by children in such education;
- examine the adequacy of resources on Palm Island for the introduction of the preparatory year and the new schooling alternative for senior students from 2006;
- liaise with the Minister for Employment and Training in establishing a school based apprenticeship scheme (including a school-based plumbing apprenticeship and other apprenticeships appropriate to the needs of the Island);
- examine on-going funding for the Work Out program, and possible expansion of this program into other vocational areas;
- liaise with the Minister for Employment and Training in examining the programs offered through the Bwgcolman Youth Education Centre, and in particular facilitate examination of the request for coxswain, welding and metal fabrication courses to be offered at the Centre; and
- implement mechanisms by which the educational outcomes of young people on Palm Island can be monitored to assist in developing a better framework for education and training on Palm Island and, in this regard, consider extending the Bound for Success strategy beyond Cape York and the Torres Strait to Palm Island.

A preparatory year of schooling (Prep) on Palm Island was successfully implemented in 2006. Sixteen students enrolled in Prep at the beginning of 2006 and were supported by a fulltime teacher and 15 hours of teacher aide time. The program has been well attended throughout the year. Pre-preparatory education is currently provided through kindergarten and pre-school programs (regularly attended by 26 and 19 children respectively).

The Government allocated funding in 2006-07 for implementation of a Year 1 Minus Two program in 35 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including Palm Island. The Government is actively examining options for the provision of this program on Palm Island.

School-based apprenticeships and traineeships are not currently offered by Bwgcolman Community School, which is a P-10 school. However, the Government is currently in discussions with the Commonwealth Government regarding the possibility of Bwgcolman Community School becoming involved in the Adopt a School Program. This program links students with businesses who provide hands-on vocational learning experiences. The Government is also working with the local New Apprenticeship Centres to improve access to work experience on the island during vacation periods.

In recognition of the importance of providing students with career pathways, all Year 10 students at Bwgcolman Community School are taking the Your Future Your Choice

program through the Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE. This program assists Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to plan for future work and training pathways. The Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE also provided welding classes for the Youth Education Centre during 2nd semester 2005. Two students participated in this training.

The Government has established ambitious targets for better engaging young people aged 15-17 years in continued education and training through its *Education and Training Reforms for the Future* initiative. The Government is committed to better supporting young people on Palm Island to participate in senior phase education and training, including initiatives such as vocational education programs and school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. Active consideration is presently being given to options to achieve this outcome and Government anticipates consulting with the community on a way forward during 2007.

Bwgcolman Community School is one of the 39 schools that are the focus of the North Queensland Region Indigenous Education Plan. The Plan was completed in early 2006 and establishes the foundations for implementing a range of initiatives tailored to suit local circumstances in communities in the North Queensland Region.

The Government is committed to improving educational outcomes for Indigenous Queenslanders and continues to improve the mechanisms by which the educational outcomes of young people on Palm Island can be monitored and their aspirations met. This will include reviewing outcomes from *Bound for Success* for their broader application.

Recommendation 34

The Minister for Education and the Palm Island Council should:

- note that, without pre-empting consultation undertaken as part of the land use plan (see section 4.3), the Committee supports the concept of an 'education precinct' around the existing education facilities on Palm Island; and
- examine separating the Bwgcolman Youth Education Centre from the Bwgcolman Community School.

There is strong interest from the Council, the Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE, the Future Directions Group and the Bwgcolman Community School Advisory Council in developing an educational precinct on Palm Island.

As noted against Recommendations 31 and 33, the Government is currently assessing the feasibility of such a venture. Government recognises that this is a critical issue for Palm Island residents and anticipates consulting with the community on a way forward during 2007.

Recommendation 35

The Minister for Employment and Training should:

- review and expedite the provision of traineeships on Palm Island (including examining opportunities for trainee positions to be available to residents through the government agencies servicing Palm Island);
- examine the possible expansion of the Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP) to other vocational areas, such as nursing and child safety; and
- examine options for the provision of community education courses to the broader Palm Island community, possibly in conjunction with the Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE.

The Government is currently examining the feasibility of expanding the Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP) to other vocational areas, including health, policing and the environment. The Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE is also looking at ways to provide additional support services to potential RATEP participants.

There continues to be a limited uptake of the existing apprenticeship and traineeship positions that exist on the island. As an initial priority the Government is seeking to improve the uptake rates on these existing positions and is working closely with the Palm Island community to support maximum uptake of local residents to these positions.

The Government and the Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE have instigated a model of off-the-job training which will allow administration trainees to attend TAFE in Townsville once per month, and the Palm Island Campus on the other three days required per month. The teaching staff on Palm Island will collaborate with business teaching staff in Townsville regarding training on the Palm Island days.

The Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE offers one afternoon per week in the Certificate IV in Indigenous Health via video link to Palm Island. Currently three trainee Indigenous Health Workers, who are members of the Palm Island community, are enrolled in the Certificate III in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care course. One Indigenous Health Worker is studying part time to become a Registered Nurse.

See also Recommendation 37.

Recommendation 36

The Council should liaise with the State Library of Queensland regarding establishing library services on Palm Island, including an Indigenous Knowledge Centre.

Discussions have been held with the Chief Executive Officer of the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council about the establishment of an Indigenous Knowledge Centre. The State Library of Queensland will work in partnership with the Council and

community to support the development of an Indigenous Knowledge Centre should the Council indicate it wishes to progress this venture.

Recommendation 37

The Minister for Employment and Training should:

- ensure that the current review by the Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE of its Palm Island campus (referred to in section 5.2.5) examines the adequacy of training courses provided on Palm Island, with a particular focus on: the employment opportunities that are available for residents on the Island and on the mainland; opportunities arising from economic development on the Island; and the sufficiency of the level of training that is available in terms of delivering meaningful employment outcomes for participants;
- facilitate an audit of the skills and qualifications held by residents on Palm Island;
- implement mechanisms by which the employment outcomes of people who undertake courses at the TAFE can be monitored to assist in developing a better framework for training at the TAFE; and
- examine opportunities for people on Palm Island to undertake apprenticeships, particularly in terms of current skills shortages and emerging needs for tradespeople through greater economic development on the Island.

Recognised Prior Learning has been conducted for over 60 Palm Island residents. This process included a skills audit. The Government's Indigenous Employment and Training Manager (IETM) is working with the Coolgaree CDEP to develop a skills profile to assist in better targeting the education and training needs of Palm Island residents.

The IETM is also working with QBuild and other training and employment bodies to identify and create sustainable employment and training opportunities and to develop the capacity of island residents to take up local contracting and employment opportunities, including apprenticeships. The IETM is developing a Regional Employment and Training Plan, which identifies existing or emerging employment opportunities and identifies training strategies to ensure local Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders can take advantage of these opportunities.

The IETM is supported by an Indigenous Employment and Training Support Officer (IETSO) on Palm Island. The role of the IETSO is to increase retention and completion rates of apprentices, trainees and vocational students and maximise employment opportunities.

To assist in improved targeting of training opportunities, the Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE has completed a review of training programs on Palm Island and their alignment to employment opportunities and has established an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee. A Palm Island Councillor participates on this committee to better align training opportunities to the needs of the Palm Island community. Additional vocational areas being considered include business administration, marine programs and pre-trade courses in engineering and construction.

The Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE undertakes destination surveys three months after graduation and the Government is introducing destination surveys for all vocational education and training students. This data will assist in the development of improved training frameworks.

Recommendation 38

The Minister for Employment and Training should monitor the impact on the Palm Island community of proposed changes by the Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations to the Community Development Employment Projects program.

The Government is currently undertaking a state-wide assessment of the implications of recent changes and further proposed reforms to the Community Development Employment Projects program. This review will include consideration of the impacts of the changes on the Palm Island community.

Recommendation 39

The Minister for Employment and Training should:

- monitor the findings and recommendations of the Federal Parliament's Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry into Indigenous employment, for possible implementation in Queensland (and Palm Island in particular); and
- examine opportunities for Palm Island residents to participate in employment on the mainland through the concept of 'orbiting' (that is, people from Palm Island being employed in places where a demand for labour exists, but returning home for short visits so as to maintain their family and cultural connections).

The report from the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs' inquiry into Indigenous employment has not been tabled in Federal Parliament. The Government will consider the report's findings for their relevance to Queensland as soon as it becomes available.

Under the Palm Island Partnerships strategy (see Recommendation 9) a working group has been established to examine "orbiting". In this context, the Government recently negotiated with North Queensland Water to implement an Indigenous employment policy for the Ross River Dam Project. While the project contractor voluntarily undertook implementation of the policy, there has been a low uptake by Palm Island residents primarily due to the need to relocate and associated accommodation issues. The Government is continuing to work with employing bodies, including the Ross River Dam Project, and the Palm Island community to support the creation and uptake of employment opportunities both locally and outside of the community.

Recommendation 40

The Minister for Employment and Training should ensure that a careers expo is held on Palm Island each year.

The Government is committed to ensuring that a careers expo is held on Palm Island each year.

This year's expo was attended by over 750 local residents and showcased over 40 careers in various industries, including childcare, sport and recreation, government, health and teaching. In addition, representatives from education institutions provided advice on their facilities, services and enrolment requirements.

The event specifically targeted young Palm Islanders and provided opportunities to learn about different career options, meet Indigenous employees from different industries and link up with potential mentors.

Feedback on this year's event from both local residents and exhibitors was extremely positive.

Recommendation 41

The Minister for State Development should continue to explore a range of economic development opportunities with the Palm Island community as part of a wider goal to develop a community-owned economic development plan. Development of this plan should entail consideration of:

- opportunities which are sustainable and likely to meet the environmental requirements of the Island;
- joint ventures with other entities (both public and private sector);
- enhancing existing projects;
- projects and industries of a range of sizes, particularly smaller scale and 'cottage' projects initially; and
- opportunities both on and off the Island.

A Palm Island Economic Development Participation Action Plan has been developed in partnership with the Commonwealth Government and the Palm Island community. The plan is being implemented and involves increasing the capacity of residents to participate in businesses. A number of business development workshops have been held on Palm Island.

Community and Council representatives have identified and prioritised a range of business proposals, which will be assessed for commercial viability. Priority is being given to business proposals where the proponents have completed the business development workshops.

The Palm Island Sponge Farm Aquaculture Project is the most developed business proposal. Assistance has been provided by Government to develop business and marketing plans and identify a range of potential business partners. The project proponents, Coolgaree CDEP, anticipate lodging an aquaculture permit application with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) by the end of 2006. An Environmental Impact Assessment may be required by GBRMPA in relation to this project. The project proponents are currently assessing the costs of the Environmental Impact Assessment and identifying funding sources as well as potential capital sources to establish the enterprise.

The Government remains firmly committed to assisting the Palm Island community to explore and develop economic development opportunities. However, future implementation of the proposals will be contingent on an assessment of commercial viability and securing adequate funding. In addition, as individual business proposals are developed it is likely that access to land and infrastructure will need consideration. These issues will be progressed with the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council and other relevant Indigenous organisations and stakeholders.

Recommendation 42

The Palm Island Council should establish a youth council and examine other avenues through which leadership can be encouraged in young people on Palm Island.

Opportunities and funding sources which the Council might explore in this regard include:

- relevant government departments and agencies, including the Departments of Local Government, Education, Communities and Emergency Services;
- neighbouring mainland local governments;
- the Local Government Association of Queensland;
- the Aboriginal Local Government Association of Queensland;
- the Queensland Police-Citizens Youth Welfare Association; and
- non-government organisations including the Australian Red Cross.

The Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council is not advocating for the establishment of a youth council at this time.

However, a range of youth support and leadership programs are offered on the island. The Government has funded the Australian Red Cross to conduct a range of activities to foster and encourage young people's leadership skills. The Australian Red Cross - Palm Island Youth Support program focuses on the provision of activities to lessen social isolation for young people and support their personal development. The program includes workshops, retreats and leadership activities. The Australian Red Cross has also secured Commonwealth Government funding for a youth mentoring program.

The Government's regional Young Indigenous Leaders' Forum was held in Cairns in October 2006. It brought together 20 young Indigenous people from the region, including two youths from Palm Island.

Preliminary discussions have also been held with community and Council representatives regarding the commencement of a Duke of Edinburgh program on Palm Island.

See also Recommendation 44.

Recommendation 43

As soon as the trustee lease for the Palm Island Community Youth Centre is granted, the Queensland Government should enter into a formal agreement providing for the management of the youth centre by the Queensland Police-Citizens Youth Welfare Association. This management agreement should be part of a management structure that also incorporates Council and community representation. Negotiation of the management structure might be best conducted by an independent facilitator. This process should also address arrangements for ongoing funding of the maintenance and management of the youth centre.

As discussed in relation to Recommendation 16, the Council has still to grant a lease for the Palm Island Community and Youth Centre.

Lease negotiations are currently centred on the involvement of the QPCYWA in the management of the Centre. While the Council has indicated a preference for the removal of the QPCYWA from the Centre's management structure as a condition of it executing a lease, the Government remains committed to the QPCYWA's continued involvement.

The Government has suggested a number of measures to alleviate the Council's concerns about continued QPCYWA involvement in the Centre (see Recommendation 16).

The Government remains committed to resolving this issue in consultation with all stakeholders.

Recommendation 44

The Minister for Communities, in conjunction with the Premier as Minister for Sport, should establish and support a Palm Island Sport and Recreation Association as the body responsible for coordinating the provision, funding and maintenance of sport and recreational activities on Palm Island. This body should be established through a consultative process involving representatives from the community, existing sporting groups, the Palm Island Community Youth Centre and the sport and recreation officers funded through the Coolgaree CDEP. The Association should be responsible for:

- developing an appropriate range of activities for young people in light of the need to ensure:
 - o a balance in the activities offered for children and young people across all ages, particularly the 15 to 19 and 20 to 25 age groups;
 - o a balance in the activities that appeal to males and females;
 - o provision of evening social activities for young people; and
 - o a balance in the variety of activities provided; that is, sporting and non-

sporting (such as dancing, art, beading, and opportunities for leadership development through organisations such as the scouts/girl guides movement);

- coordinating the provision of sporting activities on and off Palm Island; and
- managing the sporting infrastructure on Palm Island in conjunction with the Council.

Consideration should also be given to the two sport and recreation officers being funded directly through the Association.

The Government is funding a full time Sport and Recreation Officer at the Palm Island Community and Youth Centre. The officer will continue to facilitate the delivery of sport and recreation services in the community and identify community members willing to take on a development role for sport on the island.

The Government is considering what options exist to better coordinate and manage sport and recreation activities on the island. There are currently a range of activities and programs for youth on Palm Island. The QPCYWA provides various sporting, recreational, educational and cultural activities focused on crime prevention. The program includes the Graffiti Busters Project, which has resulted in positive art projects to address the issue of graffiti around the community.

The Government's Youth in Tune project is a mentoring and music teaching program for 12 to 17 year olds, and includes the purchase of band and stage equipment.

The 'Young Nippers' program is run every school holidays, with approximately 30 children participating each time. The program provides children between the ages of seven and thirteen with surf awareness and safety skills.

The Queensland Ambulance Service conducts youth motivational and leadership development camping trips. The program educates young people in first aid and the dangers associated with substance abuse. It also addresses youth suicide issues and incorporates cultural education. Two camps were conducted in 2005-06 with approximately 13 participants at each camp. Each participant was referred to the program through the juvenile justice system. To date, no participant who has completed this program has re-offended. A further two camps are scheduled for late 2006.

Recommendation 45

The Committee supports establishment of a community and cultural centre on Palm Island. The Council should:

- pursue the concept of establishing such a centre, and the facilities and activities which might be conducted at the centre, with the community; and
- liaise with the Minister for the Arts and the Minister for Communities, as to progressing the concept.

The land use plan for Palm Island should identify an appropriate site for the centre.

This recommendation was not supported by the Government on the basis of the Government's existing investment in the Palm Island Community and Youth Centre.

However, the Government is committed to supporting community and cultural endeavours and has, through Arts Queensland's Indigenous Regional Arts Development Fund program, provided funding to the Council in 2006-07. That funding will benefit community groups such as the Palm Island Men's Group (for spear and woomera making and dance) and Bwgcolman Future Inc (for a women's weaving group and the production of a commercially viable calendar).

Art and cultural workshops have also taken place through the Public Arts Planning Process, which informed development of the Art Built-In components of the Palm Island Community and Youth Centre.

Under the Positives Futures program, the Government is funding the Australian Red Cross, in partnership with Speak Out Limited, to deliver cultural development projects involving dance, music and visual arts. The project involves a 12 month program followed by a touring performance in 2007.

Recommendation 46

The Minister for Natural Resources and Mines should:

- through the Cultural Heritage Unit of the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, coordinate and facilitate the identification, preservation, protection and registration of significant and sacred sites and artefacts on Palm Island; and
- assess, in conjunction with the Minister for Environment and the Palm Island Council, the role and functions that a ranger/heritage officer on the Island could perform.

Twenty nine cultural heritage sites are currently recorded on the Cultural Heritage Database for Palm Island.

Government officers recently met with the Manbarra people to discuss cultural heritage matters. The Government plans to undertake further mapping of sites of cultural significance with the assistance of the Manbarra people, the Council and other relevant

stakeholders. This work will also include developing a cultural heritage training program concerned with the identification and recording of significant sites.

Recommendation 47

In relation to concerns raised by the Council regarding the visual amenity and facilities at the airport, the Council should:

- seek assistance from the Government Champions in clarifying the Council's responsibility in relation to the airport;
- address any concerns that fall within the bounds of the Council's responsibility; and
- seek further assistance from the Government Champions in ensuring any remaining concerns are attended to by the appropriate entity.

The Council understands that it carries complete responsibility for the ongoing maintenance of the current airport.

However, the Government recognises that the current runway facilities are inadequate and need to be upgraded to enable the use of larger and more efficient aircraft as a matter of priority. The Government is therefore proposing to meet the full costs of this partial upgrade of the airport. Subject to consultation with the Council, the work is currently scheduled to be completed by early 2007.

Recommendation 48

The Minister for Transport and Main Roads should:

- facilitate, as a matter of priority, completion of the infrastructure work relating to sea transport services (that is, dredging the channel, and upgrading the jetty and barge ramp);
- monitor the provision of sea services to Palm Island, including the assistance currently provided to the commercial operator of the passenger ferry service; and
- examine enhanced sea services for Palm Island.

Council and community input should be sought regarding infrastructure improvements.

Securing the necessary approvals has delayed commencement of upgrades to the jetty and barge ramp. However, those approvals are now in place, a tender process has been completed and upgrading of the jetty and barge ramp will start in April/May 2007. Work is expected to be completed by August 2007. The Government has allocated additional resources to cover the additional costs resulting from the delays.

GBRMPA approval has still to be secured for the channel dredging, with GBRMPA requesting further detailed information on the justification for the channel widening. The timing and scope of the dredging works is subject to securing the necessary approvals from GBRMPA.

The Government has allocated resources to continue subsidisation of ferry services between Palm Island and Townsville. Ferry services will also be enhanced by the provision of an additional midweek service, in addition to which slightly cheaper fares and a better range of concession fares for local residents will be available. Enhanced ferry services and fare alterations are expected to be in place by early 2007.

As noted against Recommendation 47, the Government is also proposing to fund a partial upgrade of the Palm Island airport.

Recommendation 49

The operation of the Palm Island school and community bus should remain with the Queensland Police-Citizens Youth Welfare Association.

The QPCYWA continues to operate the school/community bus and employs local residents as drivers. The service is funded by Government under a recurrent funding arrangement of up to \$125 000 per annum.

Recommendation 50

The Minister for Health and the Palm Island Council should liaise to establish the reasons for dissatisfaction by the Council and the community with the existing health services on the Island.

Government officers met with the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council in October 2005 and March 2006 to identify health issues on the island. The primary issue to come out of those meetings was the lack of planned birthing on the island.

The Government recognises that many rural and remote communities are concerned about the lack of birthing facilities in their communities and that there are particular issues impacting Indigenous women and babies. As part of its commitment to maternity services reform, the Government established the Maternity Services Steering Committee in December 2005. The Steering Committee is considering a range of possible reforms, including options related to the delivery of safe maternity services in rural and remote locations in Queensland.

The Joyce Palmer Health Service is committed to continued engagement with the Palm Island community to continuously improve the quality and accountability of health services on the island. To this end, Council members, including the Chief Executive Officer and Mayor, are invited to attend monthly meetings between the Joyce Palmer Health Service and the Institute of Primary Health and Ambulatory Care. The Director of Nursing of the Joyce Palmer Health Service attends monthly Future Directions Group meetings to identify and address any health related issues raised by the community.

Recommendation 51

The Minister for Health should:

- examine scope for greater involvement of the Indigenous health workers in the provision of particular aspects of the health service on Palm Island, such as in the provision of dialysis;
- examine the possible implementation of the Ferret system on Palm Island; and
- liaise with the Minister for Education in expediting filling the school nurse position as a matter of urgency.

The Government acknowledges and values the important role that Indigenous health workers play in the provision of health services. Indigenous health workers are involved across the spectrum of health service provision, including: sexual health; prevention and early intervention of harmful alcohol and drug use; treatment and rehabilitation; oral health; child health; and acute and primary health care.

To support more responsive community health care, the Joyce Palmer Health Service is currently reviewing the way community health is delivered within the Palm Island community. The Joyce Palmer Health Service has commenced consultation with the Future Directions Group and has entered into negotiations to appoint a Clinical Nurse Consultant to strengthen the delivery and sustainability of community health care.

The Ferret Patient Information and Recall System was fully implemented in June 2006 and has resulted in better monitoring and follow up of patients of the Joyce Palmer Health Service. It will be an important tool in improving the management of chronic disease in the Palm Island community.

The school-based nurse position was filled in September 2005. However, the incumbent resigned after a short period. The model of delivery of school-based health care is currently being reviewed. Options being considered include the relocation of the position to the Indigenous health worker team at the Joyce Palmer Health Service, with visiting services being provided to local schools. This will provide the school nurse with greater professional support and a closer working relationship with Indigenous health workers on the island.

Recommendation 52

In order for an assessment to be made of the occurrence and nature of suicide on Palm Island, and to ensure that appropriate services (both prevention and postvention) are provided on the Island, it is imperative that the Minister for Health, in conjunction with the Joyce Palmer Health Service and the Queensland Ambulance Service:

- conduct an audit to determine the extent and nature of attempted and completed suicides on Palm Island in the recent past;
- assess the adequacy of existing prevention and postvention services provided on the Island; and
- put in place mechanisms to track relevant data on an on-going basis

The Government acknowledges the devastating impact that suicide has on individuals, families and communities.

The Government will continue to work with the Palm Island community to increase its capacity for self-healing and to maintain the changes in Government service delivery, which have seen a shift from a purely clinical response to one of community engagement, partnership and development.

This work will be informed by the Government's recent audit into the extent and nature of suicide on Palm Island, including a review of the adequacy of current services.

The Government has increased resources for mental health services on Palm Island through additional clinical and community development staff. The Joyce Palmer Health Service provides a range of mental health services that can be accessed on a walk-in basis or through a referral from the Queensland Ambulance Service, health service staff or family members. Mental health staff have also developed collaborative working arrangements with other health program areas, particularly Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drugs Services (ATODS), and other agencies, such as the QPCYWA.

Mental health data is collected and analysed via specialised mental health software programs.

Recommendation 53

The Minister for Health and the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy should assess the need and scope for cultural healing on the Island and ways in which those needs might be best addressed.

The Government is currently providing a range of interim services on the island targeted at cultural healing.

The Palm Island Healthy Families Program provides a three day per week service which aims to re-establish family units. The service provides short-term support to families to empower them to build on their strengths, develop wellbeing and devise strategies to overcome issues in family functioning. The service is already well-used and this is expected to increase as the benefits of the service become better known.

Relationships Australia is providing training and mentoring in counselling and family support skills to staff from Bwgcolman Community School and Ferdy's Haven Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation Centre under their Shared Skills Model. Two staff visit Palm Island two days per week to provide this service.

The scope and nature of future cultural healing services on the island will be informed by the current consultations occurring around the development of the Government's Safe

Haven and Family Support Hub services. Those broader family services are likely to incorporate dedicated cultural healing initiatives.

Recommendation 54

The Minister for Police should examine:

- arrangements to enable the posting of police officers to Palm Island on a permanent basis as far as possible;
- the adequacy of cultural awareness training for police officers serving on Palm Island; and
- avenues for involvement by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander police officers on Palm Island.

On 2 November 2006, the Government tabled in Parliament its response to the specific issues raised by the Acting State Coroner in the inquest into the death of Mulrunji.

In response to the specific recommendations made by the Palm Island Select Committee, the Government recognises the benefits of permanent placement of police officers to assist in building positive relationship with the community. The majority of Queensland Police Service staff in Palm Island are permanent, apart from four uniform Constables or Senior Constables which rotate on a six monthly basis from Townsville. Permanent staff on the island include four Police Liaison Officer (PLO) positions, two of which are allocated to the QPCYWA and two to the Palm Island police station. Of the four positions, there is currently one vacancy for a PLO at the police station, which is expected to be filled by the end of 2006.

In consultation with community Elders, the Palm Island Community Justice Group and the Council, the Queensland Police Service has developed a cultural awareness package containing information specific to the Palm Island community. Cultural awareness training is provided to police who work on Palm Island by the Officer-in-Charge and the PLOs. All staff are required to complete the training within a short timeframe and usually do so within a week of their arrival on the island.

The Queensland Police Service continues to actively recruit Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders to serve as police officers through the Justice Entry Program and through direct entry into the Police Recruit Program. The Justice Entry Program is achieving significant success. At September 2006, five new entrants had graduated from the program, with a further 21 new entrants due to commence in November 2006.

Recommendation 55

The Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and the Minister for Police should, as a matter of urgency:

- collaborate with the Palm Island Indigenous Community/Police Consultative Group implement a diversion from custody option for Palm Island; and
- investigate with the community the establishment of a Murri watch program on Palm Island.

As outlined in the Government's response to the specific issues raised by the Acting State Coroner in the inquest into the death of Mulrunji, the Government will undertake consultations on the development of an integrated approach to providing further diversionary services on Palm Island. These services will be linked into the existing Cell Watch Visitors program, which commenced operation in June 2006. Community patrol options will also be considered.

The Queensland Police Service will establish a protocol in conjunction with relevant stakeholders in relation to its role in the proposed approach to diversionary services on the island. Police officers working on Palm Island will be appropriately trained in the use of the diversionary services, in line with the proposed protocol and associated operational procedures.

The Government's response to these issues will be linked to the existing service system and proposed new initiatives, such as the Family Support Hub. It is anticipated that elements of the new services could be operational as early as 2007. However, if a new facility has to be built to deliver diversionary services, this may delay commencement of the full service. In this circumstance, an interim service will be provided.

Recommendation 56

The Minister for Police should:

- ensure that the membership of the Indigenous Community/Police Consultative Group (ICPCG) includes a representative of young people on Palm Island (possibly a member of the youth council which the Committee recommends in section 5.4); and
- examine the merits of introducing the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Police (QATSIP) project on Palm Island.

A number of local youths have been invited to attend the Indigenous Community/Police Consultative Forum (Forum). However, youth representation on the Forum has been difficult to secure. As part of its work to promote community participation in the Forum, the Queensland Police Service continues to invite local young people to participate.

Police on the island continue to work with young people through other mechanisms, including the QPCYWA.

Service delivery and staffing requirements for policing in all Indigenous communities, including the merits of extending the QATSIP project, are currently being examined. A preferred model for policing Indigenous communities will be considered by Government by the end of 2007.

Recommendation 57

The Council should raise its concerns regarding the provision of legal services in the community with the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice.

The Department of Justice and Attorney-General (JAG) is in regular contact with the Council about legal services on the island. The Council has not identified any major concerns at this time.

JAG has worked closely with the Council and the community to establish the Palm Island Community Justice Group. To support this process, the Government has provided \$100 000 in funding in 2006-07. The paid co-ordinator of the Group and 30 members were appointed in October 2006. Group training is planned for November 2006 and will cover issues such as court procedures and processes and the role of community justice group members in court.

Legal Aid Queensland (LAQ) is in regular contact with Palm Island community organisations (including the Council) regarding the provision of legal services to the local community via a community liaison officer based in Townsville. The community liaison officer and a solicitor visit Palm Island once a month to provide legal advice and representation services. Residents can also telephone the LAQ Indigenous Hotline for the cost of a local call for legal advice and referral.

LAQ also participates in the North Queensland Legal Assistance Forum that consists of representatives from LAQ, North Queensland Women's Legal Service, Townsville Community Legal Service and the Indigenous Family Violence Legal Outreach Unit. The aim of this group is to effectively co-ordinate the provision of legal services in North Queensland.

The Palm Island Magistrates Court sits two to three days every fortnight. Litigants and defendants before the court are represented by the Commonwealth-funded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Legal Services – North Queensland, LAQ and private solicitors from Townsville firms.

Recommendation 58

The Minister for State Development should continue to liaise with relevant parties (including the Council, the Palm Island Community Justice Group, the Palm Island community and relevant Government Departments) in relation to the proposed local security service for Palm Island.

Business planning assistance was provided to the security firm seeking to establish a business on Palm Island. In addition, the business was put in contact with Indigenous Community Volunteers to assist with further developmental work.

The security business subsequently engaged a consultant funded by Indigenous Business Australia to assist in the completion of the business plan. It is understood that the business plan is still being developed.

The Government remains firmly committed to assisting the Palm Island community to explore and develop economic development opportunities and will consider what further assistance may be appropriate for this particular venture once the business planning process has been completed.

Recommendation 59

The Minister for Child Safety should, as a matter of urgency, examine foster care arrangements for the young people of Palm Island and identify scope to expand either the number of foster carers on the Island or appropriate alternative arrangements.

The Government commenced a state-wide foster carer recruitment campaign in September 2005, with the aim of recruiting an extra 500 foster carers from a diverse range of backgrounds within 12 months. Despite the success of that general campaign, it has proven difficult to increase the number of generally approved foster carers on Palm Island. However, the number of kinship carers has increased significantly. There are now 11 kinship carers on the island caring for children who have been removed from their families.

The Government is also looking at alternative means of providing children with short-term out-of-home support through the establishment of a First Placement House. The house would provide children and young people with an initial placement of up to one month. During that time, child safety staff would continue to work with the family to assess and address problems at home. The time could also be used to locate a kinship or foster carer should a child or young person require ongoing care.

While preliminary discussions have been held with the Council around this concept, further detailed consultations need to be held with the community to ensure the relevance and appropriateness of the service and its linkages with the existing service system. Land and leasing issues will also need to be negotiated with the Council.

Recommendation 60

The Minister for Communities, as a matter of urgency, should:

- facilitate the establishment of a 'safe house' for young people on Palm Island in conjunction with relevant federal counterparts;
- expedite the establishment of the Family Support Hub, ensuring that adequate support services are offered for parents and other family members; and
- liaise with the Joyce Palmer Health Service regarding the nature of, and need for, the positive parenting program developed by health workers at the Joyce Palmer Health Service.

Under the Safe Haven project, the Queensland and Commonwealth governments are working together to prevent and reduce the impact of domestic and family violence in the communities of Coen, Cherbourg, Mornington Island and Palm Island. The Safe Haven project has service and physical infrastructure components, namely: establishment of outreach family support services; adoption of an integrated case management approach; and provision of short-term residential care and support.

The proposed Palm Island Family Support Hub will deliver an integrated support and referral service for Palm Island families across a range of areas, including Safe Haven services for matters involving domestic and family violence. As discussed under Recommendation 53, a range of interim family support services are currently being provided on the island while the Family Support Hub model is being developed. These include a 10 week pilot Positive Parenting Program, which commenced in October 2006. The program is for parents of children aged between two and ten years.

To ensure the relevance and appropriateness of the final model, an intensive community engagement process is being undertaken. A community reference group has been established to provide input into the final service delivery model. It is anticipated that the final model will be agreed by July 2007.

The Government's ability to deliver on the physical infrastructure component of the Safe Haven services will be contingent on negotiating land and leasing arrangements with the Council.

Recommendation 61

The Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, in conjunction with the Palm Island Community Justice Group and community, should finalise an Alcohol Management Plan for Palm Island as a matter of urgent priority. Consideration (including legal advice) should be given to extending the area in which the AMP operates offshore to Palm Island to assist in the enforcement of alcohol restrictions.

An Alcohol Management Plan (AMP) commenced on Palm Island on 19 June 2006. The restricted area incorporates the 10 islands in the Palm Island Shire, all foreshores, the Palm Island jetty and the Palm Island airport. The waterways around the islands, including the water adjacent to the Palm Island jetty, are not part of the restricted area.

As discussed at Recommendation 57, the Government has also worked with the community during this period to establish a statutory Community Justice Group.

To better support the implementation of the AMP, the Government and community have worked together to develop a package of projects that offer local people a diversion from alcohol. Under the Government's Alcohol and Other Substances Demand Reduction Program the Government has committed almost \$600 000 in 2006-07 to fund a range of community-led initiatives that provide local people with alternatives to alcohol and assistance in dealing with its impacts.

These initiatives include: a yarnning circle at the local school to provide support and counselling for parents, carers and students; enhanced drug and alcohol rehabilitation services on the island; a parenting program; arts and sports-based workshops; funding to increase family and community participation in recreational activities; and workshops and counselling for male perpetrators of family violence. Funding has also been allocated for a diversion from custody program, which will be developed as a matter of priority and in close consultation with the community (see also Recommendation 55).

The Government will continue to work with all *Meeting Challenges, Making Choices* communities, including Palm Island, to enhance alcohol demand initiatives in each community. This will include working with communities to develop individual demand reduction plans to guide future action and investment in this important area.

Recommendation 62

The Minister for State Development should expedite the current feasibility study regarding a family friendly social venue on the Island.

The feasibility study on the family friendly social venue has been completed and its findings communicated to the community via the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council.

Based on the study's findings of the likely commercial non-viability of such a venue, the Government has decided not to pursue this project at this time.

Recommendation 63

The Ministers for Communities and Health, in conjunction with relevant federal counterparts, should:

- ensure a coordinated approach is taken to alcohol and drug support services on Palm Island including education, detoxification, rehabilitation and counselling; and
- in this regard, review the current provision of such services on the Island.

There are currently three ATODS officers (equivalent to two FTEs) working on Palm Island to assist in the management, early intervention and treatment of alcohol and other drug problems. The officers offer a mix of clinical and social working skills and provide a daily service, with at least one officer staying overnight Monday to Thursday each week.

There has been a significant improvement in the coordination and delivery of alcohol and other drug-related services on the island as a result of the establishment of an ATODS presence on the island and improved liaison between ATODS officers, Ferdy's Haven and the hospital-based detoxification services at the Joyce Palmer Health Service. ATODS officers play a central role in referring clients to the island's residential alcohol and drug treatment facility, Ferdy's Haven. Ferdy's Haven has itself been assisted by

Queensland Health in policy and program development, which has in turn improved the facility's capacity to provide local residents with rehabilitation services.

In addition to improving clinical coordination, ATODS officers have also forged partnerships with the Men's Group and established a weaving night for women to provide a venue and forum for education and counselling regarding substance abuse.

To maintain and strengthen this level of coordination, the Government will ensure that initiatives funded under the Alcohol and Other Substances Demand Reduction Program (see Recommendation 61) continue to complement the existing service system for alcohol and drug support services on the island.

Recommendation 64

The Minister for Industrial Relations should examine the adequacy of incentives offered to Government employees who work in isolated or remote parts of Queensland (such as Palm Island). The Minister should also consider the desirability of consistency in the incentives offered between employees of various Departments and agencies.

The Government is currently investigating a range of options for attracting and retaining staff across the State in relation to both specific geographic areas and key occupational groups. The Department of Employment and Industrial Relations is developing an attraction and retention framework that will assist agencies to respond appropriately to any existing or developing skills shortages. The framework will involve flexible, targeted remuneration and other benefits that still meet proper accountability requirements. Government is expected to consider this framework by the end of December 2006.

Recommendation 65

The Queensland Government should report back to the Parliament 12 months after the tabling of this report regarding progress in implementing the Committee's recommendations.

The Government has met its commitment to report back to Parliament regarding progress in implementing the Committee's recommendations.

Further work is required in relation to a number of recommendations. The newly appointed Government Coordinator will drive future Government action against these recommendations. The Government will continue to rely on the cooperation and support of the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council and community to progress the majority of these matters.