



# ***EDUCATION AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE***

**Members present:**

Mrs RN Menkens MP (Chair)  
Mr SA Bennett MP  
Mr MA Boothman MP  
Mr MR Latter MP  
Dr AJ Lynham MP  
Mr NA Symes MP

**Staff present:**

Ms B Watson (Research Director)  
Ms M Salisbury (Principal Research Officer)

## **BRIEFING—REVIEW OF STATE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE RATES**

### **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**WEDNESDAY, 27 AUGUST 2014**

**Brisbane**

## WEDNESDAY, 27 AUGUST 2014

---

### **Committee met at 9.32 am**

**CHAIR:** Welcome. Before we begin this morning, I will ask everyone present to turn off their mobile phones or set them to silent. Any media recording today's proceedings are asked to adhere to the committee's endorsed media guidelines. If you require another copy of the guidelines please ask secretariat staff.

This morning's briefing from the Family Responsibilities Commissioner, Mr David Glasgow, is to inform our review of state school attendance rates. We know from our previous consideration of school attendance rates that school attendance rates for Indigenous students is lower than it is for non-Indigenous students. We are interested in exploring ways to close that gap. Commissioner Glasgow is responsible for working with a number of Cape York communities on Cape York welfare reform which includes strategies to improve school attendance in those communities. We have invited him here this morning to talk with us about that work.

I remind everyone that today's briefing is a formal process of the parliament and parliamentary privilege applies to all evidence presented. Any person intentionally misleading the committee is committing a serious offence. I also advise that this briefing is being broadcast live via the Queensland parliament website. It will also be recorded and transcribed by Hansard. Once available, the transcript will be published on the committee's web page.

I now introduce the members of the Education and Innovation Committee. I am Rosemary Menkens, the member for Burdekin and chair of this committee. With me are: Dr Anthony Lynham MP, the member for Stafford; Mr Steve Bennett MP, the member for Burnett; Mr Mark Boothman MP, the member for Albert; Mr Michael Latter MP, the member for Waterford; and Mr Neil Symes MP, the member for Lytton. Committee member, Mr Ray Hopper, the deputy chair, has sent his apology for today's proceedings.

### **GLASGOW, Mr David, Commissioner, Family Responsibilities Commission**

**CHAIR:** Commissioner Glasgow, thank you for meeting with us this morning live from Aurukun, I understand, via videoconference. I have no doubt that you are enjoying the Far North Queensland weather. Although this briefing is taking place in a public forum, you are able to request through me as chair that any information you provide to the committee be kept private. While we have asked you to talk to us about some specific areas of interest, we may also have other questions for you. You can also object to particular questions. Additionally, you may wish to take questions on notice if you do not have information at hand. We may have some additional questions, but perhaps we will save those until the end of your briefing. Commissioner Glasgow, I hand to you now.

**Commissioner Glasgow:** Good morning, Madam Chair and members of the committee. I talk to you from Aurukun and send you greetings from the commissioners at Aurukun who are actually meeting whilst we talk today. I met yesterday in conference and will conference again on Thursday.

I have received your letter, Madam Chair, and the number of points that you have asked me to cover. I am happy to be interrupted at any time along the way just for clarification. I asked my office to send you all a briefing paper which consists of 11 items, much of which covers the issues that we will talk about today.

In 2007 the then state government and the then federal government agreed to fund welfare reform and each agreed to commit \$40 million for this process. In March of 2008 the Family Responsibility Act was passed by parliament with bipartisan support and the commission commenced operation on 1 July 2008, and has been working ever since. The actual cost of operation of the Family Responsibility Commission over those four years is approximately \$12 million.

I commenced in the Cairns office with 24 commissioners who had been appointed in the various communities—six from each of the communities of Aurukun, Coen, Mossman Gorge and Hope Vale. I had three staff members, which soon grew. We were quite active in the early stages

because we commenced conferencing in September of that year and have conferenced fortnightly in communities ever since. We meet usually three days a fortnight in Aurukun, two days a fortnight in Hope Vale, one day a fortnight in Coen and one day a fortnight in Mossman Gorge. In those days I travelled to each of those conferences so I was rarely at home.

The commission was in effect the enforcement part of welfare reform. I think many of you understand what our role is. But effectively it was designed for a committee of three people—two Indigenous people and me—to meet and discuss issues of concern for individual members of the communities. Those individual members were brought before the commission if they had breached one of four triggers. The first trigger was missing three days of school. They did not have to be consecutive days of school. The notices received from the education department were just three days of school missed. The second trigger was a child safety notification which could involve a whole family structure or just members, but it usually involved children or the behaviour of individuals in front of children or in their presence. The third trigger was a housing notice. That is any normal tenancy breach—failing to pay rent, causing noise or annoyance to one's neighbours or causing damage to property. The fourth trigger was conviction in a Magistrate's Court of an offence.

When those notices came to our office we had a number of responsibilities. We had to first determine whether the person to whom the notice referred was within the jurisdiction. So the person had to be a welfare recipient and had to have lived in the community at the time of the commencement of the Act or within three months before that notice was received.

Those notices were then brought to each of the commissioners or group of commissioners and we would determine which of the clients we would conference. The process was a simple one. People received notice of a conference of at least seven days. Then they would be invited to appear before two commissioners and me. That is the process. There is obviously a lot of machinery work that happens behind the scenes.

Today we have 20 commissioners in the four communities. We have 19 employees, one of whom is a temporary employee, and a number of local coordinators who live and reside in communities and have done for the duration of their employment.

That is the process. What is intended by that is to bring people into a conference to determine their behaviour. If we go back to the objectives of the Act, we find it was basically to bring people forward who breached any of those four notices if the commission determined it was appropriate. We then confer with those people to determine whether there are appropriate services for them to be sent to to receive counselling or advice such as on financial matters. But in particular we were given a direction by the board on a policy area—because that is what the board can do—that being to concentrate on children.

Perhaps I should tell you that we are an independent statutory body. I am appointed by Executive Council as are the commissioners. The board consists of three people. Initially it was the director-general of the Premier's department, the director-general of the department of social security—or it was in those days the department of families, FaHCSIA—in Canberra and Noel Pearson. Those three directors—I am not a director of the body—meet four times a year. Over the years those positions have changed. When governments changed we changed departments. We moved into the department of communities. We are currently under DATSIMA, the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs.

The process by which we work I have briefly outlined and it is more detailed in the paper. It is probably good for you to understand at the beginning that we deal with about 1,500 people in the four communities who are welfare recipients. Of those 1,500 people, we have never had more than 17 per cent of them at any one time on a basic card. The basic card process now allows us to place people on 60 per cent, 75 per cent or 90 per cent of their income, which is retained on a basic card by Centrelink and managed by the Centrelink. It can be used in multiple stores throughout various areas, but it cannot be used to purchase alcohol and cigarettes. As a debit card they can use it to buy food and other services. They can use it to save money to purchase all sorts of equipment, clothes or household effects.

When people come before us they are given the opportunity to actually change their ways and go to services. We monitor their performance by receiving reports from the referred service providers on a monthly basis. If they perform well, we follow that through. If they do not perform or do not appear before us, on the third occasion they can be given a basic card. The basic card has a maximum life of 12 months and that can be extended. That process has continued since the early days.

How we fit within the welfare reform process is we simply work on those issues. But as I have indicated, our policy direction was to prioritise children and school attendance and their appropriate health and welfare because each follows the other.

When we commenced in various communities, statistics will show that school attendance was pretty poor. In this community it was under 40 per cent. I always questioned how that was determined and was shocked to learn that in those days the afternoon roll was often marked at 11.30, so even those figures were particularly poor. Over the period, school attendance has improved dramatically, to today where in Coen it is regularly in the 90s. In Hope Vale it has good days and bad days, but it is regularly in the 80s and 90s for four days of the week, and I will explain the other day shortly. In Mossman Gorge it varies because it is a very small number of children, around 20 to 25, and their school attendance is largely dependent upon the movement of children in and out of that community. There is a great flow or a significant flow of children from Woorabinda or Wujal and some of those children may be not performing well. If a couple of kids come in they can affect the numbers, but generally the percentage attendance in Mossman Gorge has been good as well. Today, after this period, attendance is certainly far better than it was. One of the problems is that it started to plateau, particularly in the community of Aurukun, in 2012-13. We asked the government for extra powers, that is, to increase the rate or deduction of moneys to 90 per cent. We have been given that power since January of this year. We have implemented that from time to time.

That is the basis of the commission. One of our roles was to improve Indigenous authority within the communities and to encourage Indigenous people to take control. As I indicated to you when I started this discussion this morning, my commissioners are sitting at the moment on their own, so three commissioners will be sitting as we speak today. The government amended the Act last year to allow that to happen and they can do exactly what we do when we sit as three, with the exception of placing persons on an income management order. In those circumstances they have to defer and contact me and explain the reason, and I either concur or suggest another alternative. The communities have sat regularly on their own over periods of time. I have never had the opportunity or the need to reverse or to question a decision by the commissioners.

To give you an example of how well they have developed themselves, in Aurukun three of the commissioners were elected to the local council on the last local authority elections. We had, by that time, conferenced over 70 per cent of the people in the community and each of those persons who were elected received more than 52 per cent of the vote, so their position in the community is one of respect. I think much of the success of this whole organisation has been because the community has accepted their people to make their decisions. To give you an example, from early in the first year, towards November—that is, early in the conference process—I decided not to sit in the middle of a group of three. We had some discussions and it was suggested that the Indigenous people chair the meetings. That happened from November 2008. I am sure that each of you have been through the process of a selection panel where when you look to the chairman in the middle, as I am looking at you now, Madam Chair, I sit to the left and they face two Indigenous or three Indigenous commissioners across the table. In Aurukun, that was motivated largely because the conferences are done in Wik Mungkan and it took me some time to understand that language. I do not speak it, but I understand it pretty well now. In other places, conversations are not done necessarily in language, but they often revert to language.

To give you an example, Mossman Gorge, which is a small community, basically sits as three commissioners on their own most of the year. I have been there three times in the whole of this year. Hope Vale has commenced sitting on their own, as Aurukun does from time to time. These people have proved themselves to be respected by their community and the community takes notice. As at yesterday, for instance, we issued some 90 per cent orders. The vast majority of the 28 people who were listed yesterday turned up, all bar three. They take what they are given in the sense of a discussion. If we need to income manage people, we try to do that face to face. But income management is our last resort. We really want people to get their kids to school. I think you will have some questions about how that activity runs.

When we commenced in these communities, part of the funding provided school attendance officers. There were three in Aurukun from about 2010 and each of the other communities had school case managers or attendance officers. If children did not turn up at school, they would visit the homes every day and that assisted greatly with getting parents to understand the obligations of sending children to school. But it was a complete change of mindset for some places, because children did not attend school regularly and, of course, in the early days there were particular problems. In communities such as Aurukun, which had a particularly poor reputation for behaviour, the commissioners and I decided early that the school grounds would become a place apart so that

there would be no fighting on those grounds, there would be no arguments by parents on those grounds and there would be no parent/teacher confrontation. We would have that confrontation between the school case managers and the parents.

Also, we found initially a major problem was that the community had decided that the person responsible for getting children to school was the person receiving the money. We simply took the view that everybody in the household was responsible and also the father, or the other parent. In a number of cases, because of changes of relationships and because of difficulties between families, some parents were not permitted to visit their children in particular houses. So we made the school a place where everyone could go. It took a long time for everyone to accept, but a father who had not seen their children necessarily or could not see them at home, or vice versa the mother, would be free to go to the school and free to talk to the children on the grounds. It took a couple of years for that to be accepted, but I can tell you today there are rarely disturbances on the grounds. We do not tolerate that.

We also made it the responsibility of every person within the house. As we will discuss later about the reasons and the problems today, it is the conduct of the adults within the house and the conduct of everyone in that house that affects the children's ability to sleep at night safely, to have a reasonable lifestyle and to be able to attend school reasonably early in the mornings. Quite often people would come in and say, 'What are you getting me in for?' 'Well, you're in the house. You're the one who is out at night gambling or drinking. You are the one causing the problem, so if you don't assist we will income manage you'. We could not always do that, because in some circumstances they were not directly related to the children and there was no trigger notice for them to be brought in. Gradually, the communities found that that is what the community wanted to do and more and more of the families adopted that process that there was a need to make the home a reasonable, comfortable and noise-free environment. That took a long time.

To go back—and I have diverted from your letter to some extent and the items that you raised—initially, our role in respect to school attendance was predominant. That was our policy. We believed that if we got to school children who were not going to school, it was a great environment because there were good observers there. There were teachers who could observe if a child was not being fed or came with bruises or came in such a way—unclean or untidy. They were good observers. It was also a threat to anyone who was not doing the right thing by children because they were actually being seen on a regular basis. Also, it became apparent that children were not used to reasonable conduct, not only in the classroom but also in the grounds. A process had to be developed to encourage children into a satisfactory behaviour model. That took some considerable time. It also had a reverse effect by those children who behaved and went regularly to school, if children came into the classroom and were disruptive, because we often got complaints from parents: 'Our kids go every day and you're forcing other children to come in and they are not behaving properly'. There was a good interaction between us regularly in the school. Since the academy started, that has been welcomed so that the commissioners can go into the schools, they are brought over there quite regularly if there are disciplinary problems and the like.

Our priority was to look after children and, in fact, I sat up here late one year consistently for about eight to 10 weeks, week after week, to conference every family in this community to advise them of what was expected. I think we must step back a bit when we look at Aurukun, because this community is one which just did not traditionally respect education. Many people did, but not traditionally. There was not a large number of job opportunities here and there is still not. Whilst all of us sitting around these tables and the people hearing this would respect education, because that was a traditional way of us going through to the workforce, there was a history of people being unemployed and not seeing value in education. That has been part of the education process that our commissioners have tried to get across, that there is good value. In addition to that, of course, when we first came here the high school finished at grade 10, so all children had to go to boarding school and that was a significant break from family and friends and tradition. That has continued and Aurukun has a significant number, I think around 50 children, going to boarding school each year.

The strategies we use: well, we did not wish to interfere with the education process. The one thing we knew was we represented parents. I am a father of five children who have all done university degrees and all my commissioners are either grandparents or parents of children. We accept the value of education, but we did not put ourselves in a position of being able to say whether the education that they received was of value or not. It was fairly obvious to us that, if children did not regularly attend school, the chances of them getting effective education were reduced. Whilst you could say we soon got it up to 60 per cent attendance, there were some of those children who attended every day, but there is a considerable number of children who

attended intermittently. It was not that 40 per cent of the children did not attend at all. A very small percentage did not attend, but the bulk of children did not attend on a regular basis, that is, they did not attend more than three days every week. To miss one day is 80 per cent attendance; to miss two days is 60 per cent attendance. When we looked at it, the chances of those children getting a good education were fairly restricted. I think that is obvious to everybody with kids going to school. In those days, we had to win over the people to say, 'Look, there is advantage to children being educated, but they must go every day. There is a future for them. Yes, they may have to go out of community to become trained to become mechanics or doctors or lawyers or whatever, but the grounding in these early days is very important'. What we have found since is that attendance rates for prep, grades 1, 2 and 3 are really good. It falls away later. We were finding that the children in the later grades attended less.

So we have in the community now a number of children who are post 12 years of age and under 16 who have really very little literacy and numeracy skills because they are a product of an education system where they did not attend school regularly. I am talking about Aurukun. If I go to Coen, we have very good attendance rates at that school. It is a small school, around 50 children, regularly 94 per cent is on the wall outside. We lose a few children mainly through funerals where people go out of community, but they will now be encouraged to, as soon as they go out of community, enrol their children in other schools.

In Hope Vale the school is really good. We have a major problem on Fridays. What happens on Fridays is that the whole of the community finishes at 12 or 1 o'clock. That is when the council finishes works and when people finish work, and we lose up to a third of the children going out country. It is an interesting thing because those of you who have followed the Hope Vale history would know that in the last couple of years there has been a distribution of royalties from Cape Flattery and quite a number of families have received significant sums of money. Most people up there have a house on the beach or have a farm and they will spend their money buying boats or improving their houses. We can tell you that the attendance rates during the week—and I have the last five weeks at Hope Vale—go very well. They can be in the eighties and nineties on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and they can fall to 60 or 50 on Friday. We have concentrated on that. They form a number of families. Many of them have been income managed to 90 per cent and it does not seem to have a lot of effect. That is what we are concentrating on. The school is concentrating on that.

We actually talked to the council about having a condition of council employment and other ploys that children go to school full days on Friday. That cannot be done for reasons of awards and so forth. We have asked that it be made a code of conduct mainly because with the employment increasing so well at Hope Vale, a number of people are moving outside our jurisdiction. So we have this unfortunate place where we have a number of people within jurisdiction because they are getting welfare and a number of people are out of jurisdiction because they are full-time employed and not receiving benefits. Many people are earning good money out there and their kids are not necessarily going to school on those particular days. It is a matter which I think you probably reflected on about the prosecution of parents. I have put in the system the process by which people have to operate, which is, in my view, a very convoluted process. I have talked to various governments—this and the past governments—about streamlining that. I put one caveat on it. I actually printed on the bill that went into parliament and I got it this morning. I have not been through it all so maybe things have been done to change that. I certainly read in the *Courier-Mail* on Tuesday when I was flying up here early in the morning that there had been a devolution of authority to regional managers to prosecute. I will come back to the challenges, and that is one of the challenges in the community about having a process of prosecution and having reasonable and enforceable responses in relation to that.

What I am really saying is that we try and the commissioners try to work actively with the school but not interfere with the school curriculum or anything of that nature. We see now with the academy there is a great interest in children; there is a lot of interest in children staying all day. But there are peculiar problems. I will give you an example. For instance, in Aurukun term 3 is always a poor term. When you go back to look at why does it happen in term 3, you see that in term 3 the tax department sends all the tax rebates out. A family can receive their tax rebate and a lot of cash comes in. That is about the time the women start gambling. We can have gambling sessions—not drinking sessions, just gambling sessions—with pots of \$10,000. We can have those going all night and we can have mothers and grandparents in charge of children being indifferent to their care. That happens more so in this time when the cash comes in because the money goes to everybody in that rebate process. Secondly, it is a time of winter—and we do have winters up in this part of the country—and it is a time when people do all sorts of other things such as go out of town.

The other issue which is a constant problem here which the government is trying to tackle is that this is a dry community. So we get regular but intermittent sly grog within the community. It can arrive here at any time. It can arrive here at 8 o'clock in the morning because it gets through. If 30 bottles of rum come in here in a lift or 20 or 10, it is drunk immediately because if the police find it, it is poured on the ground. We can have parties starting any time during the night. Noise is a huge problem in this place because if the party is happening within the vicinity of your home, no-one sleeps. I know that is right because I go out in the days after just to see the kids who are walking around like little zombies and who are not going to school because of the noise in the community. It does not happen every week, but it happens regularly and you can lose those kids for a while.

Initially we had problems with funerals because people would take their kids out of school. I included in the data the issues that we have done with funerals. We have set up a process which each community has accepted. The councils have been very good. As often as they can they recommend that funerals happen on a Friday rather than midweek, but you tend to lose people all the time. We tell people, 'You have the day before and the day of the funeral and that is it. If you want more because you travel somewhere else, yes, you need to apply for that.'

It is interesting to reflect on funerals because people come and make all sorts of excuses for sorry business. As I understand it, traditionally—and we are talking before Christian missions—children who had not gone through the process of entering into manhood or womanhood, initiation, children under that age, never went to funerals. With the Christian missions it was a different thing altogether. Now it builds up so people take their children and they all go to every funeral and not the funerals that necessarily matter. Our commissioners were so annoyed about it, even with Abstudy. We would find that a parent would ring up and say, 'My child has to come home for a funeral,' and they were not directly related to that funeral and Abstudy would fly them home. What we have said and the commissioners have said is, 'Look, if you are directly related'—and that does not necessarily mean blood relation because a person other than blood could have brought up the child and is effectively the mother or father—and you are at boarding school, we should have a ceremony for all the people who have died when you come back and only those directly related should come back.' We have tried to build that into the system. We are trying to eliminate those sorts of issues with consultation with the communities. The communities accepted that and several of them do not abide by it, so we try to bring them back into line. Of course, if they miss the three times, we get the trigger so we know we can bring them in.

We have tried to look at funerals and look at travel away. Another issue which is a major one in the Aboriginal communities in the cape is that every mother goes to Cairns or Mount Isa a month before the birth of a child and will stay some weeks later because that is the safest way for the child to be delivered. They take children down with them. They are still enrolled in the school and they are only taken off the roll if they are re-enrolled in a school in the Cairns or Mount Isa area. We have tried to work that very carefully to tell people that is what they have to do to make sure their children are enrolled because if they take them away, they will still be on the attendance record.

The other issue was the Cairns show, which was a major problem for people wanting to go to the Cairns show. We eventually had Hope Vale regard that as their show holiday. In places elsewhere we make sure that people understand that you cannot take a week off just because you want to take the kids to the show. In that sense, we have attacked those issues as they have come up and we have tried to be proactive. The community has also done the same thing. When I am talking about 'we', I think we need to understand we have a very effective police force, very effective health people here and good people in education. They are all working with the same objective: they want to minimise crime, maximise the school attendance and give people a reasonable life. I must pay a great deal of tribute to the police, the educators and the health people in these communities because they really do try very hard. It is not what the FRC did or the commissioners did; it has been a combined effort. We have tried to lead the way in that by saying we must all work together. They were our strategies. We tried to get community support by getting people—for instance, we have a particular problem at the moment in Aurukun with a number of children and disciplinary problems in the school. During the school holidays we are going to get those parents in to find out exactly why there are 10 to 12 of them causing a major problem, what the particular problem with those children are, to try to engage them in some process of starting a proper discussion with their own kids to see why these things are happening and to give them some skills about that because these kids are behaving quite abominably in school and are being suspended. They also have a habit of inducing other children to join them in the process. We will do that in the school holidays coming up. We try to meet regularly with the school and find out what needs to be

done to assist. We do that in every community, and every community is different because every community has different issues. They may have similarities to grog, behaviour and noise, but they have different issues in relation to their own children and their own families.

Moving on a little, we tried to be inventive but, again, we accept that we are not the panacea of all knowledge. We are simply representing parents. Those commissioners know exactly what happens day-to-day in the community. So we try to be as proactive as we can without intruding on other people's lives. One of the things we have tried to work on is to stop this cylinder view that particular people have only a role in this area and others have a role in this area. We have actually started a process of getting the clinicians together to talk to each other so that they know which particular client they are actually dealing with, they find out which clinician is dealing with the same client and they try to communicate with each other and do cooperative counselling or hold cooperative meetings with families so they are not driven by a demand by this particular group or that particular group when there is a proper way of doing things or an ordered way of doing that. That commenced this year and is having some reasonably good results.

When we say we do these things, it is just that we observe a need. We get very good cooperation from the council. They have regular meetings, interagency meetings, within the communities. So they sit together and talk to them. They also need to be reminded—all the agencies in the various communities—that we are working for a common goal. The common goal is that we need to make sure that we are not wasting money, that we are spending it wisely and that we do not duplicate services. There is still a lot of duplication.

One of the issues which really is a problem in the schools is discipline. I do not mean discipline to the point that needs the cane; we are past all that. It is really a matter of understanding children, how they are treated at home, what they cop at home, what they see their parents do and telling them that is not the behaviour within the school. Some people come from fairly dysfunctional households. They come from violent households or they come from households where people yell and scream and use foul language. They come from households that have a huge amount of regular pornography in the homes. You can tell from the language children use to their teachers because it is an Americanised language in many respects.

So when those kids come from there we have to accept that there are a number who do not have acceptable behaviour in class. There is also the issue of mental health problems for children, which is significant in some communities. Many of you would know about FASD, the foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, which affects many children in these communities. It is when mothers have been drinking exceptionally heavily or drinking prior to birth and children suffer disabilities. An attention level, the ability to absorb and the ability to sit are things that a number of children do not have. I do not know whether it is more exceptional in Aurukun. I perceive it to be so more here than elsewhere. That places teachers under a great deal of pressure. If you have one disruptive child in a class it can disrupt the whole class. Those matters have been looked at. There has been a lot of work done by the wellbeing centre and the RFDS in looking at that. They work cooperatively with the academy. It is a matter of finding data and seeing if the data is accurate or whether there are false assumptions about those matters.

Going back to disruption at school, one has to worry about the sleep deprivation of children because of the noise and behaviour issues. Noise tends to be music blasting. I hear it from my place at times. It keeps me awake and I am half a kilometre from where it happens. It does not happen every night. It certainly did not happen last night. But I am told it happened on Monday night. Children in that area are not sleeping well.

With noise comes arguments and violence and the threat of violence or just loud threats. That can be counterproductive to people. For children from that environment when something really goes wrong, how do they react? We have some very good teachers, but I do not know whether we train our teachers well enough to be able to deal with those things. They are some of the problems I see with school attendance.

I mentioned gambling before. It is not an offence to run a gambling store. It is if you take a cut. As I understand the Act, we can all be playing a game here. It is not illegal as long as the house is not taking a cut. That is the illegality of it. How do you encourage people not to do that? In a sense it is an activity that the women enjoy. They have little else. We have sewing clubs and other constructive things, but no-one has a garden in this place. It has not been traditional to grow fruit trees or vegetables. Very few people do that. So there are not a lot of activities. There are some activities for women down at the art centre. So gambling becomes a form of relaxation. It can go all night and have the resultant effect on children, such as them not being in bed and being at those places.



I have really gone into the challenges and the things that need to be faced. I do not think they are very much different from other communities. What happens here in Aurukun does not necessarily happen in Hope Vale, but in Hope Vale there can be noisy parties at night but people now have enough gumption to do something about it and complain.

Initially, for instance, police attendance at a house for a noise complaint was not regarded as a potential breach of a tenancy. Police and housing required a complaint. As soon as a complaint was made those people were isolated. I knew that happened in Hope Vale. So we managed to get an arrangement between housing and police that if someone was called to a serious noise complaint and it was recorded that that could be sent to housing as being a process where the tenant had to explain. You had to go through three of those before housing would give them a notice to come to see us. When we got them in we could do something about it. So people were saying, 'Why don't you get this person in because they are having a noisy party.' We tried to work out a legitimate way to do it so we get a trigger. We get those people in now and we try to do something about it, mainly because it affects the lives of the children in adjacent homes and the lives of everyone.

So we have looked at what we can do within the confines of our legislation. You may know that there is a bill before parliament now that has gone to committee. The Health and Community Services Committee is meeting today to consider that bill. It will allow us two additional triggers. For any child who goes before a court we will be able to conference them and their families and carers.

Interestingly, in Aurukun about 80 to 85 per cent of property damage and break and enters and damage to vehicles is caused by youths. It equates pretty well to what happens in Cairns—about 80 to 85 per cent is done by youths. What we are hoping to do is to get those youths who are not attending school to come in with their carers and try to do something about that. We want to look at their education as well. This bill, I think with bipartisan support, will go through parliament hopefully in the next sittings. So from early next year we will have that provision. There is an additional provision which allows us to look at the serious offences—the District Court and Supreme Court offences. We will get those triggers. So people who have been found guilty of very serious, violent offences and very serious offences right across-the-board and are released from prison will be a trigger for us and we can explain to them the facts of life of their behaviour.

They are the issues that have been put up to the government which would be of assistance. I go back to the 90 per cents. We find that there are a very small number of people in Hope Vale and Aurukun who principally have the children who are not attending school. We requested of the federal government the ability to income manage to 90 per cent. We have done that. I have some figures here about that. I realise the time has got away on me. There are currently 66 orders for 90 per cent, 42 of them in Aurukun, 17 of them in Hope Vale and seven of them in Mossman Gorge.

The majority of them relate to children who are very poor school attenders. How we manage that is we say to someone, 'You get your kid to 80 per cent and I will drop it back to 60 per cent.' We think that is a fair deal. That means if you miss one day of school instead of it being 90 per cent you will go back to 60. We have tried to use these systems as a negotiating factor with the parents. We are succeeding in part with that. Although, I have to say, yesterday there was a failure and we put her back on 90. At least for a period of time the kids were going to school. It is a management process. We do not blame everyone in the community because we are getting a larger number of children going to school now than when we started. We were hoping that that would be so.

I am sorry I have talked too long. This is something which is of great joy for me. I started this at a time when I was due to retire. It has been a fantastic experience for me to see Indigenous people taking control. The message I leave with you is: if you really want to do something in these communities Indigenous people have to take control of school attendance and be responsible. They also have to be responsible for behaviour in the community. That is what the mayor of Aurukun is saying, 'It is no good me telling you you cannot drink, you should take control of your community.' That I think is the success of it.

**CHAIR:** Mr Glasgow, the briefing has been absolutely fascinating. You apologised for speaking for too long. Do not apologise. As a committee, we have been enthralled to listen to you. Firstly, could I thank you very much for the information that you have sent us and for all the depth and wealth of information that you have just provided to us. The key is the communities taking responsibility and control themselves, as you outlined then. That is certainly a huge driver. As you said, yours is a very broad role. Ours is to look just at school attendance. That is the end product of all of the work that you are doing. We have a few minutes left. I will hand to the committee and see if there are questions that members wish to put to you.

**Mr BENNETT:** Thanks for your time this morning. I am just wondering about other jurisdictions across Queensland, particularly with large Indigenous communities. You mentioned Woorabinda in one of your comments. Is this commission working more actively in those other communities or are you concentrating on the cape?

**Commissioner Glasgow:** The process started as a voluntary process. Four communities volunteered. I understand the government is considering going into another community which has requested it. Our Act, when it is amended—assuming it is—will not have an end date. I understand that the government will be saying to other communities, subject to finance and subject to federal government support—because we need federal government support for basic cards and the like—that people can opt-in and opt-out of that process.

I go back to what this was originally designed for. It was designed as a short sharp process. We were supposed to be finished at the end of 2011. That was our four years. Here we are in 2014. At the end of 2011 we had some good positive processes. The question one has to ask is: do you continue to do this or is it necessary to maintain levels? That is a question for government. So now we are not going into other communities unless the government asks us to. I understand it will be on an opt-in opt-out basis.

**Dr LYNHAM:** Mr Glasgow, I refer to the multifactorial approach you have. Is there one single thing in your mind that really did it? Was it the card, the lack of alcohol or community engagement? What is the one big thing that you think is probably the biggest trigger for this?

**Commissioner Glasgow:** I think the question is a very valid one. I have to answer it in this way. There is not one big thing. I relate it to my own life with my children. We all had problems with various kids and we got over them. I started with a concept from my father that if I did not go to school I got a hiding. It was an expectation that I would go to school get not just a job but a decent job and do better than my parents. That was the case for my four sisters and I.

That is lax here because there are many generations that have not had the need to work or seen the opportunity to work or worked consistently. If you look at Hope Vale which is different, I saw when they established the banana farm a completely different community attitude because there were 50 jobs down the road and there was real community pride in that place. Unfortunately, it was damaged by the cyclone, but it is being reconstructed now.

We would say to the people who came from prison, 'There is a job down the road there,' and they could walk into a job if they were prepared to work out there. No-one worried why they had been in prison. If someone comes out of prison in Aurukun (a) there are no jobs here and (b) they are on parole and they have reporting conditions. There is not really employment. I have noticed that when people are employed they are so busy they do not have time to worry about a lot of the other things which directed them to do things of misadventure, so to speak.

I have watched Coen where they have really done well with employment and Mossman Gorge which has its you-beaut gateway project. If you have not seen it, it is magic what they have done up there. Hope Vale has Cape Flattery and the banana farm down at Lakeland. There are employment opportunities. When people are employed it seems to take away a lot of the problems we see when people are sitting on their hands. I hope that answers your question?

**Dr LYNHAM:** Thank you very much.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much Mr Glasgow. Sadly, time has come to an end.

**Commissioner Glasgow:** Could I just say one other thing?

**CHAIR:** Please.

**Commissioner Glasgow:** One thing I have learnt here is when children go back to school they go with behavioural problems, which is understandable, because they do not have the necessary skills in the classroom or the playground. It seems to me that when you are starting to get kids to go back to school there should be a transition before they get into the classroom. I think it would help very much if schools understood that you cannot just put David Glasgow back into the classroom if he has not been going to school for the last 14 weeks. He has to learn what is expected of him. That takes resourcing. I think that is one of the issues. As school numbers go up you need to resource and look at those kids who are disruptive to others. That is my final comment, thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIR:** Interesting comment. Thank you for that. Thank you very much for the briefing, Commissioner Glasgow. Could I add that anybody interested in receiving updates about our work, including in due course our review of student attendance rates, can subscribe to the committee's

## Briefing—Review of State School Attendance Rates

email subscription list via the Queensland parliament's website. The committee will now take a moment or two to prepare for our second briefing this morning when we will hear from the Department of Education, Training and Employment in respect of the Education and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014. Thank you very much Commissioner Glasgow. May we wish you all the very best in the wonderful work you are doing.

**Committee adjourned at 10.32 am**