

Anne and Lawrie Martin.

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The Vegetation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill introduced into the Queensland Parliament by Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy, Anthony Lynham, is to be applauded and strongly supported.

At first look the amendments clearly show sincere attempts to redress damaging wrongs hurriedly enacted by a previous government which displayed its dictatorial mantra by dismissing 26 per cent of the State's workforce in its initial months of control of the treasury benches.

The in-place Vegetation Management Act was amended by the incoming Newman government as a means, it was said, of expanding the State's agricultural activities to elevate financial standings in regional areas. Following this introduction broad-acre land clearing started apace.

Conversely, the economic fortunes of middle and lower income families in the Cassowary Coast area diminished, this appearing to be at the same speed as land-clearing.

Shops in the central business districts of Innisfail, Tully, Mission Beach and Cardwell quickly became vacant, while State Government agencies decreasing their employment levels contributed to this major economic downturn.

Obviously, the denigration of the natural environment has a stultifying effect on local communities while the expansion of crops, such as sugar cane and banana plantations, may improve incomes for farming families, local communities do not benefit to any degree.

Despite this production increase, meaningful work opportunities are not offered on a large scale to district youth, eventually leading to petty crime, drug ingestion via deepening depression and resultant community health fragmentation.

Also aligned with this vegetation clearing for agricultural purposes is the need to introduce chemical fertilisers to bolster unsuitable soil standards and the chipping away at narrowing natural vegetation growth running parallel alongside creeks, streams and rivers.

It is all acting as a retard on progressive community development and mainly creating down-scaling difficulties for citizens on the ever-lowering economic scale. It may be coincidental, but the higher environmental damage goes, the lower community standards drop, and this has to stop.

Figures produced by the Tully Support Centre for its most recent annual report (July, 2016 – June 2017) lend weight to the anti-clearing case. Although wildlife –mammal, insect, avian, reptile and Piscean communities suffer badly from indiscriminate clearing, so, too, do humans receive brutal treatment.

During the reported period by Tully Support Centre there were 200/250 people per week, out of the catchment base of some 4,000 appearing at the centre for assistance. This represented an increase of 20 per cent on figures for July, 2015 – June 2016.

These figures appear to be echoed by Innisfail Support Centre.

The Tully figures are certain to increase following the outbreak of Panama Race 4 disease in district banana crops, which has increased in the new reporting period. The outbreak puts extreme doubt on the minister's assertion when introducing his draconian tree clearing legislation back in the Newman days that farmers were best-placed to protect the health of the environment.

As people who have contributed to local environmental upgrading by planting native trees to assist endangered mahogany gliders and southern cassowaries, we were deeply concerned over the shredding of environment protecting laws by the LNP Government.

We welcome this latest attempt to rectify the damage done by wide-scale clearing and recognise many decades will elapse before a noticeable effect will be in place, but it is imperative a start takes place.

Riparian areas of this State are certainly in need of protection because they provide a substantial and quality habitat for indigenous animals and are extremely valuable corridors for interchange of relationships.

On our 2.5 hectares, designated “Land for Wildlife” property we have more than one hectare of old growth trees, slightly less than one hectare of regrowth forest (possibly 25-years-old) and less than half a hectare of mixed garden and planted trees.

During Cyclone Larry in March, 2006, trees in the old growth forest did not bat an eyelid, pioneer trees in the regrowth area, black wattle and Sally wattle suffered damage, some uprooted or severely twisted, and in the mixed area the old growths remained standing and regrowth trees suffered.

In Cyclone Yasi, in February, 2011, a Category 5 event, the eye of which passed directly over the property, the old growths suffered limb loss, regrowth was battered but many remained standing and it was similar in the mixed area.

These patterns were emulated throughout the region in both cyclones which has given us the opinion that regrowth trees are not just scrub, as used in the local vernacular among farmers.

Indeed, they are important ecological formations and deserve protection, too. At five years of age they are more likely to withstand atmospheric events, such as high winds, than nursery produced seedlings used for revegetation purposes.

Even teen-aged trees which were planted out years ago suffered more damage than younger regrowth and, due to this observation we would recommend a younger age than 15 years for regrowth protection.

Considerable clearing has happened in the region surrounding our property, mainly for more cropping, with resultant increases in wind speeds and dust. This has promoted regular aerial spraying of agricultural land surrounding our property, making household use of rainwater unsuitable and most unwise. Fortunately, we have a bore. But on our property, which was once deemed to be in an established Mahogany glider corridor, evidence of glider activity has not been seen during our tenure of some 13 years. This includes when for

some weeks a hopeful official feeding station for Mahogany gliders was established on our property following Cyclone Yasi.

We must stress we are not anti-agriculture. However, we are against indiscriminate tree clearing which, in our rural area, Murray Upper, has resulted in many of the trees, some of them very old with tree holes, making up the natural corridors being removed. Assuming gliders were still in the vicinity, this would make it impossible for them to cover any of the distances necessary to maintain their habitat or find mates.

For Mahogany gliders, endemic only to a small and fragmented coastal strip from approximately Tully Heads south to just north of Townsville (their world habitat) trees are essential to locomotion. Currently these animals are critically endangered.

The region's wildlife should be a matter for pride. Instead, it seems, no value is placed upon it in favour of financial gain which benefits only a very few and appears to lead to a reverse "Robin Hood" effect.

We have attached the Tully Support Centre's 2016 – 2017 report, and thank you for this opportunity to comment on legislation which had both concerned and disturbed us.

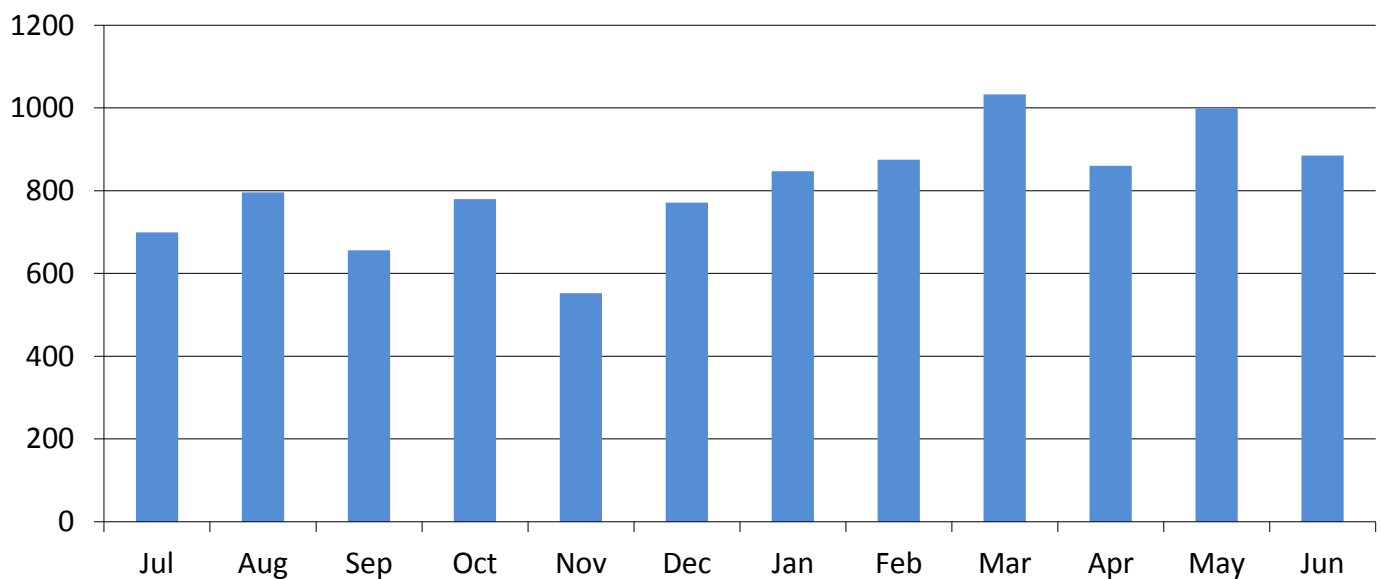
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Tully Support Centre – 2017 Statistical Data

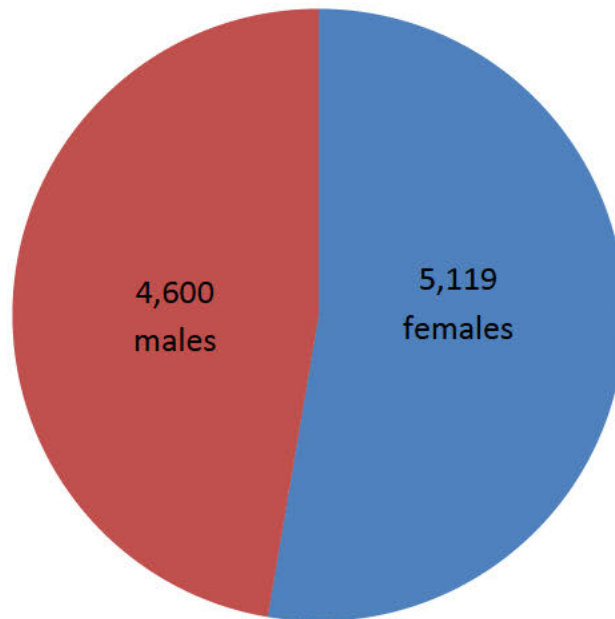
The following statistical data is drawn from the 2017 Tully Support Centre Annual Report. The full 2017 Annual Report is available online at http://www.tullysupportcentre.com.au/resources/TSC_2017_AGM_%20Report.pdf

The following statistics are for the front office for the 2016 – 2017 financial years and represent the number of people accessing the centre on a monthly basis. Front office statistics are reported at monthly committee meetings. These statistics do not include contacts through outreach, community engagement, the Tully Youth Centre or group activities.



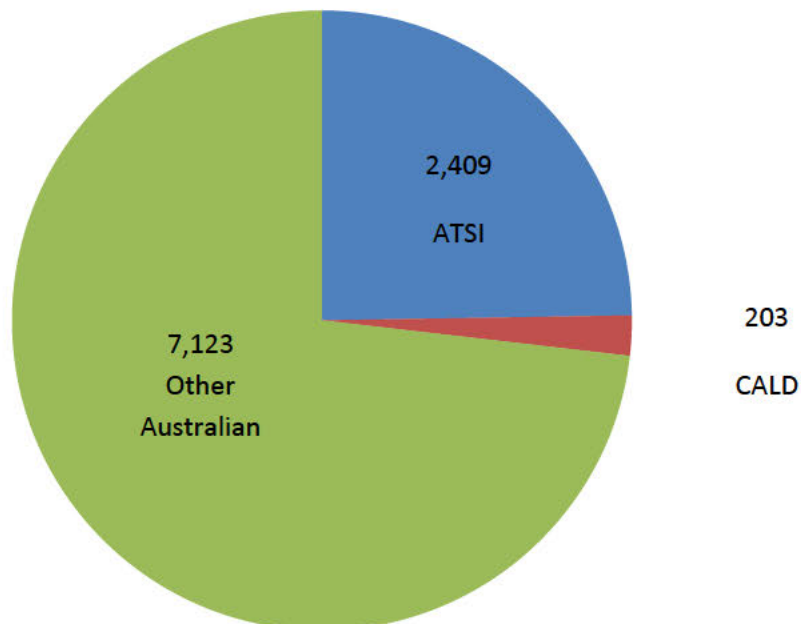
There were a total of 9,735 client contacts with the centre, a 20% increase compared to 8,108 recorded client contacts last year; this equates to 195 clients a week for the 50 weeks the centre is open.

Number of Male and Female Client Contacts



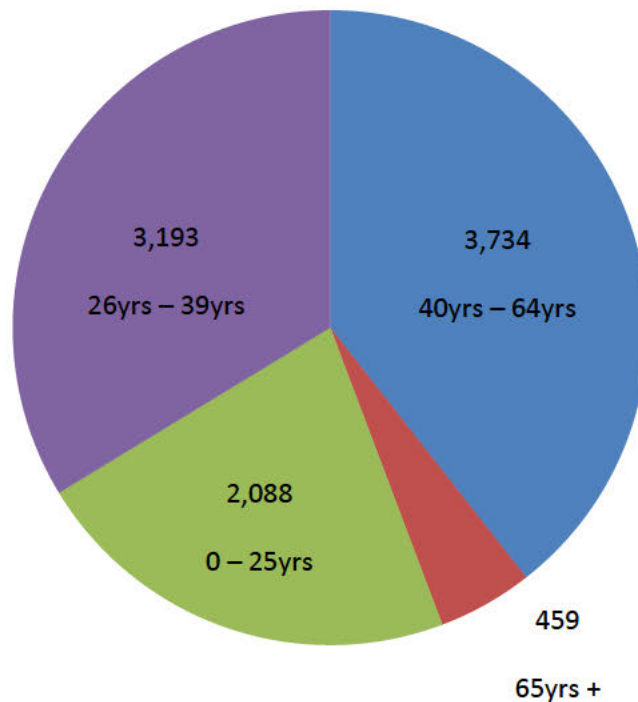
NB: Significantly 47% of client contacts are males; traditionally the majority of clients connecting with neighbourhood centres in Queensland are females.

Client contacts by Cultural Background



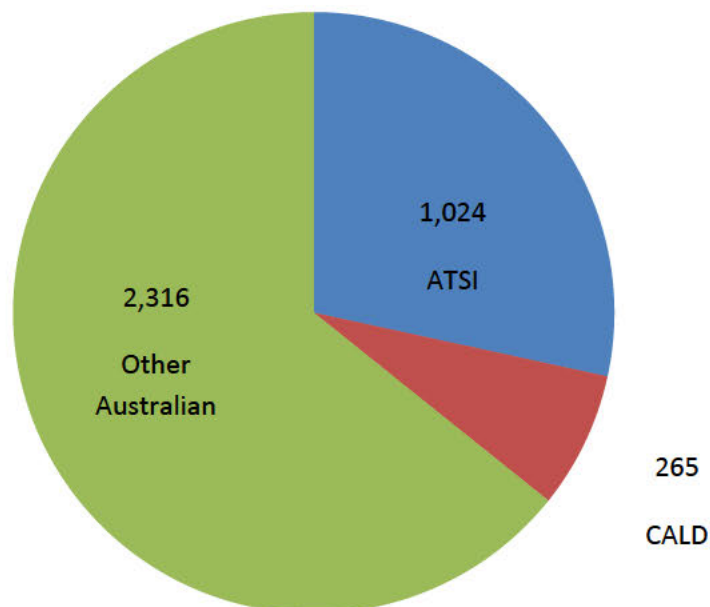
NB: 24.7% of clients identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

Client contacts by Age group



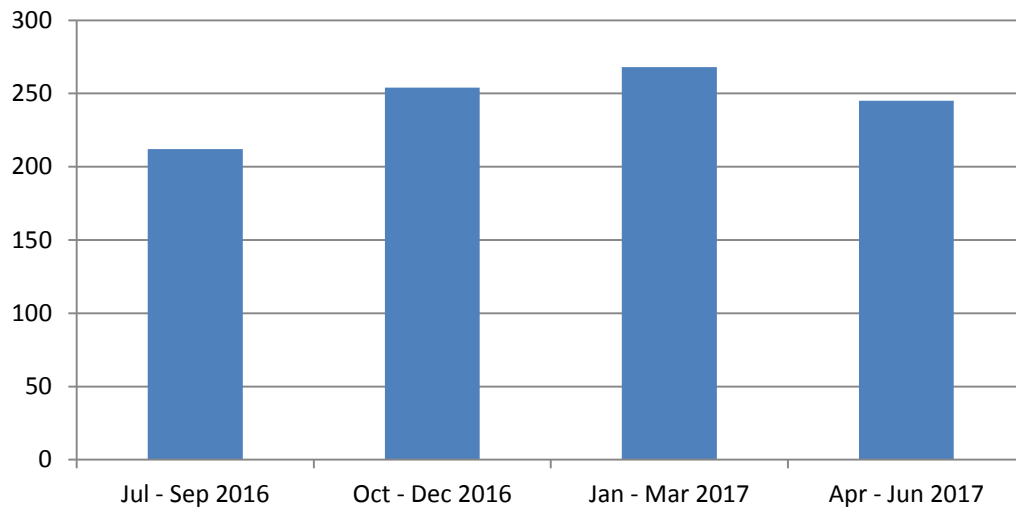
NB: These figures are consistent with the funded programs of the TSC.

Contacts for general support, information, advice and referral



The total number of client contacts for **general support, information, advice and referral** for 2016 – 17 was 3,605 (**1,024 ATSI and 265 CALD**), compared to 3,041 contacts in the previous financial year.

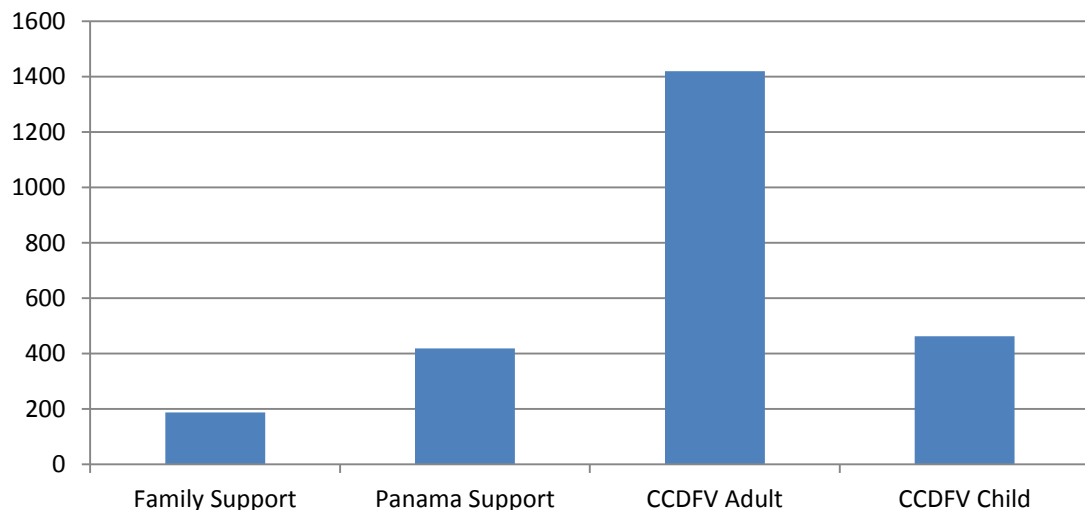
Number of Case Managed Client Contacts



The total number of client contacts for **case management** under the Family Support program for 2016 – 17 was 979 (**168 individuals including 38 ATSI and 32 CALD**), compared to 648 contacts in the previous financial year.

NB: This service has achieved an average of 19.6 case managed contacts per week. The total capacity for this service is 21 contacts per week.

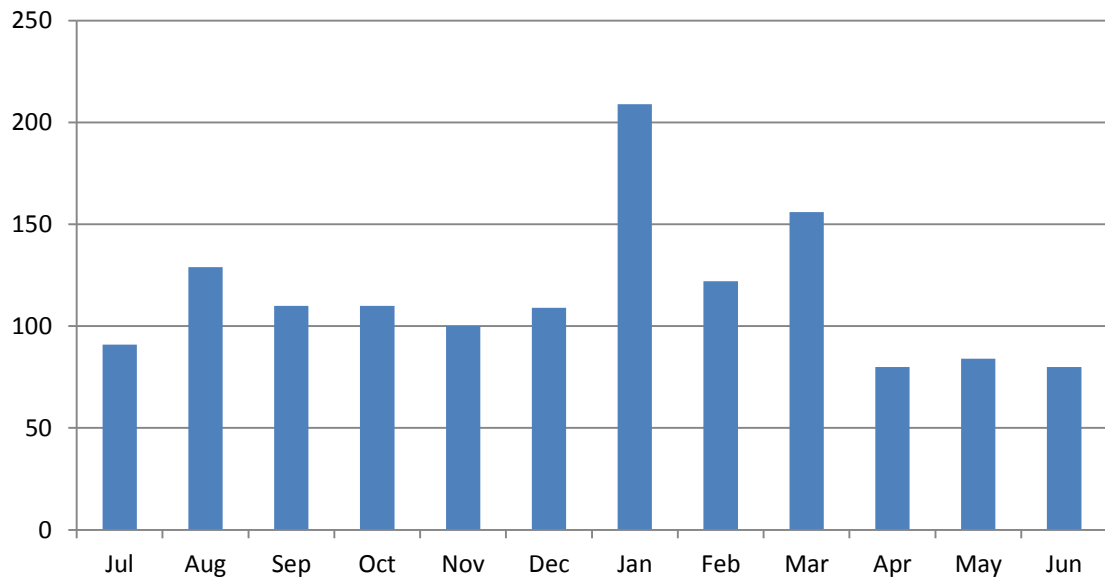
Total number of counselling sessions provided by program



The total number of client contacts for **counselling** provided under the Family Support, Panama Support and CCDFV programs for 2016 – 17 was 2,489 (**452 individuals including 101 ATSI and 68 CALD**), compared to 613 contacts in the previous financial year.

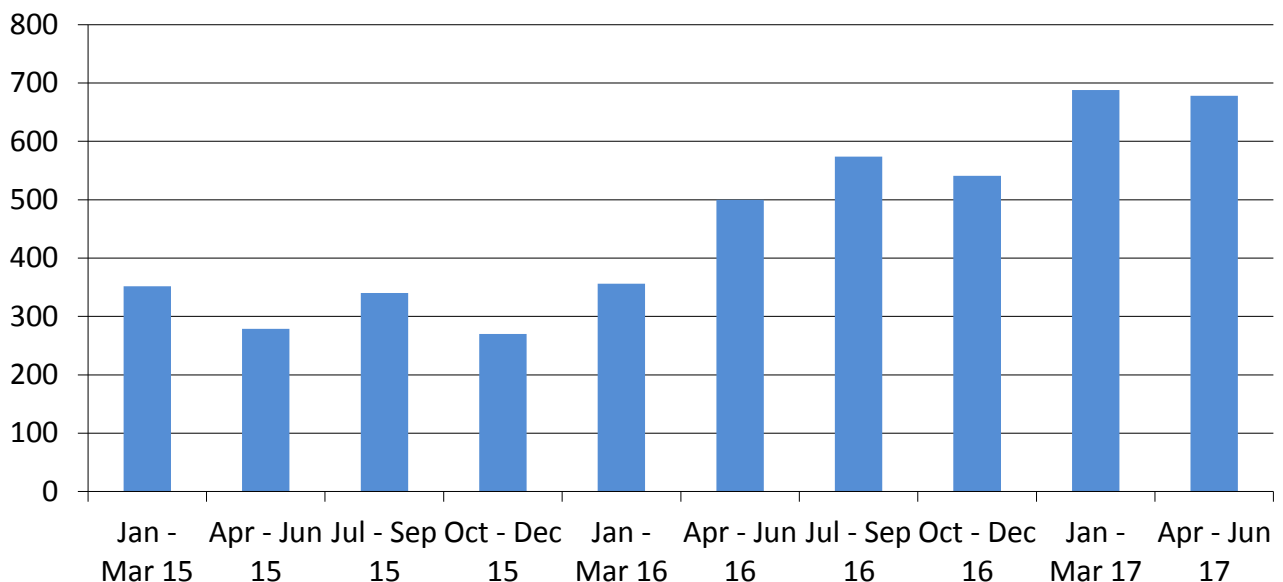
NB: The CCDFV program only operated for 3 months of 2015 – 16.

Number of Emergency Relief Contacts



The total number of **Emergency Relief** contacts for the 2016 – 17 financial years was 1,380 (**246 individuals – 112 Male, 134 female – 107 ATSI, 13 CALD**), up from 1,112 in the previous financial years.

Centrelink Agent contacts



As the local Centrelink Agent the TSC connects with community members who are experiencing employment stress. The number of community members connecting with the TSC for assistance to access Centrelink support payments has risen from around **300 contacts a quarter** prior to the initial discovery of Panama to around **700 contacts a quarter** this year.

Regional Snapshot

The economic and demographic impacts on each organisation are identified by the following statistics compiled from the Queensland Government Treasury Queensland Regional Profiles Cassowary Coast Regional Council (CCRC) Local Government Area (LGA) Resident Profile 2017 compared with the rest of Queensland:

- 73.3% of residents within the CCRC LGA fall within the two most disadvantaged quintiles, compared to only 40% of the rest of Queensland,
- None of the CCRC LGA is considered to be in the least disadvantaged quintile compared to 20% of the rest of Queensland,
- 11.8% of families within the CCRC LGA live on less than \$650.00/week compared to only 9.4% of the rest of Queensland,
- 17.6% of young people aged under 15 live in families with no parent employed compared to only 13.5% of the rest of Queensland,
- 9.8% of people aged 22 to 64 years receive Newstart (unemployment) allowance compared to only 6.3% of the rest of Queensland,
- 5.4% of community members receive a Disability Support Pension, compared to only 4.1% of the rest of Queensland,
- 9.7% of community members identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples compared to only 4% of the rest of Queensland,
- The CCRC LGA also reports a higher population of community members aged over 65 years with 18.9%; compared to only 14.7% of the rest of Queensland.