



Hon Glen Elmes MP, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
and Multicultural Affairs, Minister Assisting the Premier

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17 SEP 2014

Mr Trevor Ruthenberg MP
Chair
Health and Community Services Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Email: hcsc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr Ruthenberg

Thank you for your letter of 15 September 2014 concerning a submission from the Cape Indigenous Mayors Alliance in relation to the Family Responsibilities Commission Amendment Bill 2014 (the Bill).

In response to the Mayors' concerns, I would like to advise that the Family Responsibilities Commission (FRC) operations have never been and never will be extended to any community without significant consultation occurring with community members, local government, stakeholders and service providers. For example, an extensive consultation process in relation to the FRC took place in Doomadgee throughout April to June 2014 including doorknocking of all 178 homes in the community. Support for the FRC to be extended to the community was overwhelming, which was a significant factor in Doomadgee becoming a welfare reform community area on 7 August 2014. A copy of the Doomadgee consultation report is attached for your perusal (Attachment 1).

Further, the proposals to extend the FRC and expand the triggers for FRC notifications, as put forward in the Bill, were thoroughly canvassed with the original welfare reform communities (Aurukun, Hope Vale, Coen and Mossman Gorge) as well as Doomadgee.

As part of its decision to continue welfare reform in the existing communities and extend to Doomadgee, the Government also took into account the findings of the independent evaluation released in 2013. This evaluation found that Cape York Welfare Reform (CYWR) had made some progress in restoring social norms and re-establishing local authority, with the FRC Local Commissioners playing a significant role. It also found that CYWR had led to fundamental behavioural changes in money management, responsibility for children, school attendance, educational attainment and attitudes to work.

According to the Evaluation, the role of Local Commissioners in guiding and supporting community members, as well as exercising powers to have income management orders imposed, appears to have been effective in making behavioural change possible.

The Evaluation also found there had been statistically significant improvements in school attendance in Aurukun and Mossman Gorge, while Coen and Hope Vale maintained their relatively high attendance rates. The increases in school attendance were not part of a broader trend in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Nevertheless, more work is required for school attendance in these communities to achieve parity with the Queensland average.

These statistics support ongoing feedback from the communities about the link between welfare reform and improvements in community life. Attached is a copy of a letter dated 10 September 2014, sent to the Committee by the Deputy-Mayor and three councillors of the Aurukun Shire Council (Attachment 2). The letter supports the Bill and notes that the FRC has had a major and positive influence:

“School attendances have improved out of sight since the FRC commenced in 2008 and the quality of the lives of community members improved significantly.”

While I understand the letter may not be considered a submission to the Committee, it provides a clear indication of the outcomes welfare reform has achieved in the Aurukun community.

I would also like to point out that the FRC has access to a wide range of referral services to assist families with matters related to school attendance; income management is by no means seen as the only response or solution. In combination with the FRC's power to recommend income management, the Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE) is also working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to continue to improve educational outcomes.

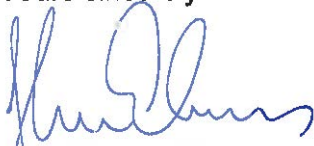
In relation to Community Justice Groups (CJGs), it is envisaged that the Local Commissioners, who have a leadership role in their communities, could support the CJGs through mentoring and advice, especially where CJGs need to be more effective in their communities. This would improve CJGs' capacity to provide local leadership, including for when a community may no longer needs a welfare reform program and the FRC is withdrawn.

At this stage, however, the success of the FRC continues to be driven by the dedication of the on-the-ground Local Commissioners, whose ideas have been implemented in several of the changes proposed in the current Bill.

If you require any further information or assistance in relation to this matter, please contact Ms Robyn Kerr, Director, Community Initiatives, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs, on 3224 7907.

I trust this information will assist with the Committee's consideration of this important Bill.

Yours sincerely



Glen Elmes MP
Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs
Minister Assisting the Premier
Member for Noosa

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