



Speech by

Hon. MIKE REYNOLDS

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

Hansard 22 April 2004

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Indigenous Child Care Agencies

Hon. M. F. REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (10.06 a.m.): Addressing the scientific overrepresentation of indigenous children in the child protection system will be one of the Department of Child Safety's most important jobs over the next three years. Currently 24 per cent of all children in protective care in Queensland are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, and that is totally unacceptable. The percentage is much higher in north, north-west and far-north Queensland, with between 50 per cent and 60 per cent.

The Beattie government is moving swiftly to put systems and additional staff in place and to find ways to reverse that situation. One of those ways is the formation of a strong network of indigenous families support agencies to provide responsive services. Our main priority will be the establishment of 23 new or expanded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care agencies, or AICCAs, and helping them to re-establish a peak body. AICCAs will offer an extensive program that delivers family support and therapeutic services, and there will be more focus on providing ongoing assistance and support to carers.

An Indigenous Support and Development Unit will be established in the Department of Child Safety to provide these agencies with the necessary support and resources. In the past they have been overloaded and they have been underfunded, and in many ways they have been set up to fail. Delivering culturally appropriate child protection services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities will also be very, very important. All child safety service delivery staff will undergo compulsory cross-cultural awareness training which will include specific case planning to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection.

My department will be focusing on recruiting indigenous staff at all levels, including paraprofessionals, so we can better support our indigenous partner agencies. We will also be developing an indigenous community awareness and recruitment campaign to encourage more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander foster carers across the state. I believe it is vital that indigenous agencies deliver a range of programs, including family restoration and support, primary prevention, parenting support and early intervention as well. I am hopeful that all of these measures combined will significantly reduce child abuse and neglect and the number of notifications in indigenous communities across Queensland.