



Speech by


Hon. Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Cape York Welfare Reform

 **Hon. CW PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (Minister for Disability Services, Mental Health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships) (10.14 am): The ABC's flagship current affairs program, *Four Corners*, recently highlighted changes that had taken place over time in Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The contrast between Aurukun under the Bjelke-Petersen regime and Aurukun today under a Labor government could not be more stark. Our groundbreaking policies have helped shape communities where school attendance is up and levels of violence are down. On the *Four Corners* special, Aurukun was held up as a beacon of hope and an example of what can be achieved when people and communities embrace reform with courage and conviction.

The Cape York Welfare Reform trial has played no small part in bringing about change for the people in Aurukun, as well as Mossman Gorge, Hope Vale and Coen. The trial began in 2008 in partnership with the federal government, the Cape York institute and the men, women and children of those four communities. While the results are promising, we know that there is more work to be done. To this end, I am holding talks with mayors and community leaders on the future of the trial. I also want to hear from justice groups, service providers and residents in the trial communities.

Many people have had a role to play in the early success of the trial. One organisation's achievements in particular ring loud and clear, and that is the Family Responsibilities Commission. As I said, it is a shining example of what can be achieved when communities embrace reform with courage and conviction. It links welfare payments to social benchmarks, including school attendance—and its results in getting children to school have been a success as well as a re-establishment of local authority. Between semester 1 of 2008 and semester 1 of last year, school attendance rates in Aurukun increased from 43.7 per cent to 62.1 per cent.

The Cape York Welfare Reform trial is about closing the gap on the health, education and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with practical policies and sensible solutions right in the heart of local communities. I am hopeful that these reforms will deliver lasting, long-term benefits, and I am keen to listen and learn from local communities as to where to from here.