




Speech by

Hon. Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

Hansard Wednesday, 26 October 2011

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES COMMISSION AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. CW PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (Minister for Disability Services, Mental Health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships) (4.45 pm), in reply: I thank all honourable members for their contributions to this debate, which have all been very genuine. I welcome the support of all parties and the Independent members for the bill. I understand that, when the original FRC legislation was introduced, while everyone acknowledged the significant levels of disadvantage in Indigenous communities some members were reluctant to take such a dramatic step. I also thank the member for Moggill for his acknowledgement of the complexity of the issues that the bill and the trial overall seek to address. The trial is unique in many ways. It has been operating since July 2008 under a tripartite arrangement between the Australian government, the Queensland government and the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership. Its objectives go beyond the usual government parameters of delivering services in response to the need to support the provision of services and initiatives intended to bring about major social change. It is relatively expensive—although all initiatives in remote Indigenous communities are expensive—and, given the levels of disadvantage in the trial communities, the options of doing nothing or doing the same thing as government has done in the past would be even more expensive and, ultimately, it would be Aboriginal children who would pay, with their future chances limited by our lack of vision resulting in their lack of opportunity.

While the arrangements relating to the FRC are unique, they are but one of many ways in which the Australian government has implemented income management for social security recipients, as highlighted by the member for Waterford. Because of these factors, it is important that there be a thorough and independent evaluation of the initiative. The next 12 months will provide the opportunity for that evaluation. Not only will this evaluation discern the outcomes achieved during the trial; it will provide cost-benefit analyses of specific initiatives and a sound evidence base for government decision making into the future. It is only once we have the results of the independent evaluation that this government can determine the next phase of supporting the trial for these communities to become stronger, more resilient and improve their community wellbeing.

We are committed to making this trial work. This trial, including the operations of the FRC, is under a great deal of scrutiny at the community, state and federal levels. The need to monitor progress of the trial and the importance of reporting regularly on the FRC's activities, successes and failures is the reason the Premier committed to tabling quarterly reports of the FRC in parliament when the original FRC legislation was being debated. I was pleased to be here to table the 12th quarterly report of the FRC yesterday. The results are encouraging, with positive changes in school attendance, decreased levels of violence and more families taking the step to address issues with services in place to support them. I want to reiterate the Premier's acknowledgement made in 2008 and which remains relevant today. It was an acknowledgement of the leaders of the individual Cape York communities who have had the courage and the commitment to be part of this trial. I welcome and look forward to the continuing contributions of those leaders to improving people's lives in the communities of Aurukun, Hope Vale, Coen and Mossman Gorge.

It is apparent from the trial that the FRC commissioner and his team of local commissioners have shown courage, resilience and compassion—and, most importantly, they have shown results. The number of residents voluntarily seeking services has increased. The number of residents applying for voluntary income management to assist them to structure their family budgets and to learn how to save and use their money has increased. The number of parents participating in student education trusts to put money away for their children's education and health needs—their children's futures—is astounding. These are initiatives that other communities could learn from.

I firmly believe that strong and meaningful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders are absolutely vital. We share a common goal: to build stronger and more resilient communities that will stand up to the scrutiny of future generations. I could come in here and speak of the billions of dollars being invested into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities but, as we say time and time again, it is not about figures and dollars; it is about people. It is about children, it is about women and it is about men. It is about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people telling us that they want a hand up and not a handout. That is why we are working hard to build better homes, create economic opportunities and improve health outcomes.

The amendments relating to the temporary custody order support the operation of the order included in the Child Protection Act 1999 by the Child Protection and Other Acts Amendment Act 2010. The order will be made only when the department provides the court with sufficient evidence that the order is necessary to protect the child who is at an unacceptable risk of harm. In these circumstances, a temporary custody order for three business days will secure the child's safety and allow time for an application for a child protection order to be prepared and lodged.

The order is similar to the pre-existing temporary assessment order, which allows the department to take a child at risk of harm into custody for three days to conduct an assessment. The enactment of the temporary custody order was necessary to provide for situations where the department has already assessed a family and formed the view that, for example, an unborn child will be at risk unless taken into care immediately once born. The department will have had contact with the child's parents prior to seeking a temporary custody order. Once the order is made, as with other orders under the Child Protection Act 1999, the department is obliged to provide a copy of the order to the parents. Temporary custody orders provide the department with another option to enable them to act quickly in order to protect children at immediate risk of harm.

I thank members for their contribution to the debate on the amendments to the Adoption Act 2009. This important amendment will support people who adopt from overseas under Queensland legislation and their adopted children to ensure access to Queensland birth certificates.