



Speech by


**Hon. Glen Elmes**

**MEMBER FOR NOOSA**

Hansard Wednesday, 12 September 2012

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## **FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES COMMISSION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. GW ELMES** (Noosa—LNP) (Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs and Minister Assisting the Premier) (3.31 pm), continuing: I rise to continue with the introduction of the Family Responsibilities Commission Amendment Bill 2012. The Commission operates to restore local Indigenous authority and build stronger and more resilient communities through attaching behavioural obligations to the receipt of welfare payments. The Family Responsibilities Commission Amendment Bill 2012 is a necessary pre-condition for an extension of the trial for a second time. The act and the trial were originally scheduled to expire on 1 January this year, but were extended for 12 months and currently expire on 1 January 2013. The key aim of any Indigenous community intervention must be to build the capacity of the community so community members can have greater control over determining their own future and reduce reliance on government support. That can only be achieved if the community is prepared to accept that challenge and the responsibility that goes with it. Sometimes, assistance is needed to achieve that.

The trial is a partnership between the Queensland government, the Australian government and the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership. The Queensland government is committed to maximising the benefits of the trial. The Australian government has also requested that the trial be extended for an additional 12 months. I had questions about extending the trial because we are still waiting for the results of an independent evaluation of the trial, which is being overseen by the Commonwealth government. My concern was that we did not have all necessary data to make a fully informed decision because the Commonwealth government has not provided the final evaluation report, which was due at the end of last year. The latest advice my department has is that the final report is now expected in November. I expect that the final evaluation report, when it is ultimately received, will inform future decisions in relation to the provision of more appropriate and effective services to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

As a precursor to extending the trial, my department undertook extensive stakeholder and community consultations in Brisbane, Cairns, Mossman Gorge, Coen, Hope Vale and Aurukun. Indications are that services provided through the trial have had some success in improving school attendance and reducing antisocial behaviour. The consultation demonstrated that there is widespread support for the continuation of the FRC for a further year and for the continuation of key programs associated with the trial, such as parenting assistance. A commonly held view emerged that those programs are having a positive effect on the behaviour of communities, with improved social cohesion compared to that before the trial.


The principal objective of the bill is to make the necessary amendments to the FRC Act to ensure that the operations of the FRC are extended by 12 months to 1 January 2014. To address the practical difficulties that have been experienced because the current provisions relating to the FRC board require that all three board members attend meetings, the bill removes this requirement and provides that a quorum for these meetings is composed of two members.

Trial processes have been reviewed as part of the review of all programs by this government. For the continuation of the trial, changes are proposed to the overall governance arrangements and improved reporting requirements to ensure the greatest benefits for the communities involved. Community leaders from the four communities will be invited to be part of a new advisory board with representatives from the

state and Commonwealth governments and a representative of the Cape York institute to oversee the trial during the extension period. The board will provide advice to me on how \$4 million in project based funding provided by the Queensland government for the trial extension might be used. These new governance arrangements will be linked to the implementation of rigorous project management to ensure that services are delivered and milestones are achieved together with close scrutiny of each project to ensure value for money.

To ensure the continued operation of the FRC for a further 12 months, amendments to the FRC Act need to be passed and given assent or proclaimed prior to the expiry of the current act on 1 January 2013. The appointment or re-appointment of commission and board members will also be required. Extending the operation of the FRC for a year will provide continued support for the restoration of socially responsible standards of behaviour and local authority in the trial communities and improve the wellbeing of community members. The Cape York Welfare Reform trial is driven by a basic principle, which underlies the Newman government's Indigenous agenda—that state government programs and funding are directed towards improving the stability and sustainability of Indigenous communities. Our focus is on overcoming disadvantage by providing support and structures which enable communities to achieve better social and economic outcomes in areas like health, housing, education and employment. I look forward to continuing to work with the Commonwealth government and Indigenous communities in the pursuit of one aim: assisting Indigenous Queenslanders to secure a better standard of living and quality of life. I commend the bill to the House.

### **First Reading**

 **Hon. GW ELMES** (Noosa—LNP) (Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs and Minister Assisting the Premier) (3.38 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

Question put—That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

### **Referral to the Health and Community Services Committee**

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Watts): Order! In accordance with standing order 131, the bill is now referred to the Health and Community Services Committee.