




Speech By
Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

Record of Proceedings, 25 May 2016

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Aurukun

 **Hon. A PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (2.06 pm): A fundamental right for children in Queensland is to access education. The priority of my government for the children of Aurukun is their continued access to education. Overnight, we have seen further threats to the safety and wellbeing of our teachers in Aurukun. The safety of our teachers is essential, as is the safety of all community workers in Aurukun.

On Monday this week, my director-general and other senior government officers met with leaders and community groups in Aurukun to discuss how best to bring about lasting calm to the community. There has been further unrest overnight and, following this, our teachers have again expressed concerns about their safety. The incidents overnight were on top of several difficult weeks during which there have been several alleged offences committed against them.

Today we have made the serious decision to withdraw the teachers until the end of this school term and this will be effective immediately. Consideration of when the teachers will return to the community will be made closer to the start of the new school term in July. This will be subject to assessment of the situation in the community at that time.

School staff are being relocated out of Aurukun and into Cairns from today. From there we will facilitate their return travel to their own homes and will offer them our full support as well as counselling. I want to ensure each teacher leaving the community has the appropriate support. I thank them for their dedication and their service.

In Aurukun, the PCYC will be providing activities for the children who would be at school. In addition, we are making arrangements to have an education program provided. We want those children to have the opportunity to access education at this time. I will be working with my Minister for Education to make arrangements for distance education to be provide from Cairns. We will continue to work with the community to engage children and young people through school and employment pathways.

The police will ensure that the PCYC is open, fully staffed and safe for Aurukun's children to attend. Our focus remains on the immediate safety of our teachers, members of the community and the workforce in Aurukun. We have an enhanced police and security presence in Aurukun, including 17 police officers and another four additional officers to be deployed in coming days. They will be operational by the weekend bringing total police numbers to 21. A 24-hour police presence is being maintained.

A short time ago I met with my ministerial colleagues and their directors-general to develop and implement a whole-of-government plan. This plan will be developed with the community and it will initially focus on the safety of community workers and members of the community. The plan will seek to restore calm to the community. This latest incident highlights the challenge ahead for the Aurukun community and the government in ensuring calm.

Following Monday's meetings between senior government officers and the community, and given the continued unrest, I am expediting a joint action plan—a coordinated government approach to ensure community safety. It is critical that initiatives be community led to bring about real and sustainable change. Recent discussions with the community will assist with the development of a plan. A clear path forward is needed—one that is based on the community being central to the actions needed and ensuring they receive strong and ongoing support.

As part of the action plan, a new position of senior government coordinator is being established. This role will coordinate collaborative government and community efforts in addressing the problems of disengaged young people, violence and unemployment in Aurukun. Senior Sergeant Brendon McMahon has been appointed to this new role of senior government coordinator for six months. Senior Sergeant McMahon has extensive experience working with the Aurukun community as the officer in charge and has been responsible for establishing and coordinating multiagency responses during major events, natural disasters and very serious community unrest.

This new role will have a whole-of-government focus, will report directly to the director-general of the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships and will support the mayor in his crucial role as community leader. Senior Sergeant McMahon will be travelling with me to Aurukun on Friday. Mr Michael Schaumburg, Director-General of the Department of State Development, is the government champion for Aurukun and will be hosting a round table next week to further support community action.

I spoke to the mayor, Dereck Walpo, at length earlier today. I would like to thank the mayor for welcoming these officers and facilitating productive discussions. I want to pay tribute to the mayor for his dedication and leadership on behalf of his community.

I have faith in the strength of local government, and we are in agreement with council and the community in addressing these issues. As I said yesterday, the immediate safety of the community and the workforce is critical. By doing this, we can engage children and young people through school and employment. I am hopeful that we will be able to very quickly provide the safety and security needed. We will continue to work with the Aurukun community to support and make change.