



Speech By  
**Jason Hunt**


**MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA**

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Record of Proceedings, 24 February 2022

**LEGAL AFFAIRS AND SAFETY COMMITTEE**

**Report, Motion to Take Note**

 **Mr HUNT** (Caloundra—ALP) (3.56 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to the debate of the *Oversight of the Queensland Family and Child Commission* report. Despite COVID and despite the statutory review of the commission, it has continued in its very important work, even though the pandemic has disrupted its operations—as, indeed, it has every aspect of the public and private sectors. One can only imagine the impacts of this had the government not got the health response and the economic response so correct. Despite this, Commissioner Ms Cheryl Vardon was able to note a number of highlights and I would like to acknowledge them now.

First and foremost, I suspect, will be the Growing Up in Queensland project, which is a marvellous way of connecting with children right across Queensland. More than 8,000 children engaged with the project, which is a triumph in itself, and these children went to great lengths to talk about their community, the pandemic and the things important to them. These children came from across a spread of ages from four to 18. The younger children were even able to draw pictures in a book and write a little story under each picture as part of their submissions. Interesting to note is the fact that 64 per cent of the children were female. It is pleasing but not surprising to learn that these children are optimistic about the future and excited about possibilities around further education and what their jobs might look like in the future. Their concerns included mental health and the environment.

Tragically but importantly, the commissioner is now the chair of the Child Death Review Board, which reviews the death of any child known to the child protection system. The role of the board is not to investigate the actual deaths but to discover if there were any systemic failures. In May last year the QFCC tabled the report *Counting lives, changing patterns: findings from the Queensland Child Death Register*. Mercifully, there has been a steady decrease in child deaths since 2004, at around three per cent per year, although it is worth noting that, maddeningly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be over-represented.

As far as oversight is concerned, the QFCC indicated that there is good work going on and that where there is room for improvement it is acting—measuring what matters and ensuring that children are safe. I join the commissioner in highlighting the excellent work of the Youth Advisory Council, which launched targeted events and helped shape the policy. There is also the Out of the Dark initiative, which is a partnership with police and other agencies to alert parents, teachers and carers to predatory behaviour online. The QPS and the Australian Centre to Counter Exploitation indicated that during lockdowns and time away from school predatory behaviour had increased greatly. This is something we need to be mindful of right here in Queensland. The Out of the Dark campaign will teach parents and carers the real-life conversations these predatory creatures use to engage with our children. These animals are skilled groomers and are both skilled and insidious. I encourage all members to view the Out of the Dark video, although be advised that it is disturbing.

The commission has also engaged with the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce which, as we now know, will make a significant difference to reform in Queensland in our response to domestic and family violence. Children are very often seen as collateral damage in this area, if not the actual victims.

To close, I would like to go directly to the contribution of Commissioner Natalie Lewis. She stated—

A key priority has been consolidating and extending the critical oversight role of the QFCC, identifying systemic issues and advocating for improvements. Then being able to monitor the impacts of those changes is key to an effective children's commission.

Queensland remains the first and only jurisdiction to commit to a generational whole-of-government strategy to eliminate the over-representation of First Nations children in out-of-home care. There have been significant reforms and investment but until now there has been no clear mechanism for accountability or capacity to examine the impacts of those reforms at a local level. The principal focus of work seeks to deconstruct that formula of over-representation, accepting that to comprehensively address the issue means that we not only have to reduce the rates of entry but also have to be mindful of the duration of time in care and move towards reunification as a form of exit from the care system. With that worthy goal and on that positive note, I commend the report to the House.