



Speech By  
**Stephen Bennett**


**MEMBER FOR BURNETT**

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Record of Proceedings, 12 June 2025

**EDUCATION, ARTS AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE**

**Report, Motion to take note**

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (3.18 pm): I was privileged to accompany the Education, Arts and Communities Committee on their visit to Hope Vale and Cooktown. I thank them for their hospitality and for inviting me to attend. Thank you also, Mr Deputy Speaker Krause, for the opportunity. It was great to be accompanied by Family Responsibilities Commissioner Tammy Williams. We had the privilege in the last term in opposition to have oversight of the FRC as a committee, so it was great to reconnect with the commissioners, and Commissioner Williams' company was really worthwhile.

The purpose of the visit was for the committee to meet with local commissioners in Hope Vale and to learn and observe the work of the FRC in community. For the new members of the parliament who got to travel, I hope it was all that you expected and I hope we can do more in the future. I readily accepted the chance to meet up again with the FRC, having served on different committees over the years, and feel lucky to have had oversight of the performance and functions of the FRC and their work.

The work of the FRC is not well known or celebrated. It was established in 2008 in partnership with the federal and state governments and the Cape York Institute. In holding conversations with community members to work with individuals and their families to engage in socially responsible standards of behaviour, looking after children and other vulnerable people in these communities. The FRC operates in five welfare reform communities in Aurukun, Coen, Doomadgee, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge.

I note that there is interest from other communities to participate. Personally, I would welcome an expansion of the welfare reforms across Queensland and across the Cape. Why? It is because there are many challenges in our communities and we benefit if we can assist. Where we have triggers and examples of contrary to community expectations, we should be doing all we can. This may include: failure to enrol or send a child to school; convictions in the Magistrate, District or Supreme Court; child safety and welfare issues; breaches of housing tenancy agreements; and domestic and family violence incidents. Those five communities are not isolated but they are important. They deal with alcohol management plans as well.

The visit to Hope Vale and Cooktown allowed the committee to observe FRC community client conferencing and engagement—to see firsthand the work occurring in communities and the work of the justice reinvestment roundtable discussions with FRC and the Cape York Institute. Meeting with local commissioners provided insights of the work being done. I was privileged to meet Erica Deeral. I believe she is the daughter, not the granddaughter, of Eric Deeral the first Indigenous person elected to this place from 1974 to 1977. I was asked to drive Mrs Deeral back to Cooktown after our visit to Hope Vale. Erica was in the car. It was great to learn about her political life and her family's involvement. She not only talked about her father with much love and passion but also talked about how the community embraced that community back in the 1970s when he was the elected member for Cook.

One of the other things that I hope the other members took away is how passionate the local Indigenous people are, particularly Erica, about the memorial and the work that has been done to celebrate the arrival of Captain James Cook in Cooktown. We spent an afternoon there, looking at the work that has been done over a long period to celebrate and acknowledge the history—both white and black—but, more importantly, the respect that was shown was wonderful.

I want to pick up on issues of resourcing. We met with the police and, of course, they were under-resourced at the time of the visit, and they had been for a long time. There were issues with housing and retaining staff there. A lot of times there were questions asked about their capacity to be able to respond to events in the evenings—something that is not ideal. I place on the record that that was a takeaway for me.

I also want to talk about some of the issues that were raised after our O-Hub meeting—the wellbeing centre, the Cooktown State School, the Hope Vale campus, the academy and the additional information that we took from visiting that community and seeing the work that is going on there to try to make that community a better place.

I quickly want to touch on the Family Responsibilities Commissioner's letter to the committee. It was not a surprise to me that I would be hearing about issues of housing and the barriers with QBuild and that it can take two years to build a home, the travelling and the links they have to that community. It is an opportunity for us all to acknowledge we should be empowering young people to become tradespeople in their own communities like Hope Vale. It is an employment pathway. Real barriers do exist that prevent qualified tradespeople within these communities. Of course, I talk about Public Works and Housing and QBuild. To hear that houses can sit there for two years not being constructed I found really quite disturbing.

There was instability in policy settings, program longevity in achieving sustainable employment in remote communities. There used to be programs that employed young people and governments used to work with them, but clearly in Hope Vale those sheds were shut. There is work for us to do in those communities. There is limited visibility and accessibility—I am out of time. Thanks for the trip, guys. Let's do it again!