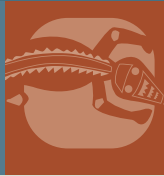


CHALLENGES AND OUTLOOK



Challenges and outlook

On 7 August 2014 Doomadgee was prescribed by regulation as a welfare reform community area. The decision to add Doomadgee by regulation was made following an extensive eight month consultation process which involved the Commission's Local Coordinators visiting each home in the community. The outcome of consultations was an overwhelming level of support and recognition that the Commission was needed in Doomadgee to address child safety concerns and high levels of school absenteeism. Challenges faced in regard to Doomadgee have been in the implementation of administrative procedures. Initial School Attendance Notices and jurisdiction checks were required to be processed manually whilst DET and Centrelink processes and systems were being set up. Although the use of income management for Commission clients in Doomadgee has been agreed to in principle by the Queensland Government, implementation has been delayed by the need for the Australian Government to review the Forrest Report recommendations in regard to the 'healthy welfare card (debit card)'. Unfortunately the commencement of operations in Doomadgee without the ability to impose an income management order has been considered less than ideal. Despite delays the Local Commissioners have used the opportunity to remind conference attendees of their personal and communal responsibilities and obligations. The Commission has been working with the Doomadgee State School to review their current student rolls, in particular the accuracy of the carer/parent recorded. The confirmation of jurisdiction process for the Commission has identified a group of students who have parents/carers listed who have not resided in Doomadgee for some period of time. As a consequence notices received were not able to be conferenced as the current parent/carer was not identified as within jurisdiction. Additionally, the Doomadgee State School operates on a weekly schedule of four extended days (8:30 am to 3:00 pm - Monday to Thursday) and one short day (8:30 am to 12:30 pm - Friday). The effect of this schedule in regard to the reported weekly and term attendance will be reviewed by the Commission.

The Commissioners from Hope Vale report that the revitalisation of employment for the community through the Hope Vale Banana Farm has had a clear influence in the development of healthy school routines being set by the parents. The Hope Vale experience supports the Commission's belief that local employment opportunities are critical to changing social norms, and it is vital that wherever possible, economic development in the Cape communities must be sourced and encouraged.

Difficulties associated with operating in remote regions have been consistently reported in the Commission's previous quarterly and annual reports. These difficulties are compounded by fluctuating airfares which are often inordinately high. Additionally, the unpredictability of transport providers is a complicating factor. The demise of Skytrans airline resulted in major disruptions to flight schedules, and in some instances the Commission was unable to book flights. These challenges highlight the Commission's reliance on consistent and dependable carriers to facilitate its operations.

In July 2012, the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry was established and Commissioner Hon Tim Carmody, QC was tasked with reviewing the effectiveness and efficiency of Queensland's child protection system. Subsequently on 1 July 2013 Commissioner Tim Carmody presented his final report to the Queensland Government entitled 'Taking responsibility: A Roadmap for Queensland Child Protection, 2013'. The Commission has reviewed the trends of Child Safety notices received since the release of the Carmody Report and can report that these notifications have not declined significantly or at all, partly due to the continued receipt of domestic violence matters from the beginning of the year where children were present but un-harmed. The community-based service, known as Family and Child Connect, will not be established until early 2016 in the welfare reform communities. This initiative, which will act as an intermediary between families and Child Safety and will assess whether a notification is forwarded to Child Safety for action, is intended to be an early intervention to be established across Queensland locations to support families who are at risk of entering or re-entering the child protection system.



CHALLENGES AND OUTLOOK

The Family Responsibilities Commission Amendment Bill 2014 was introduced into the Legislative Assembly by the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs on 5 August 2014. The Health and Community Services Committee (HCSC) was required to report to the Legislative Assembly by 1 October 2014. The HCSC was to (in part) consider the policy to be given effect by the legislation and consider the application of fundamental legislative principles of the Bill. Briefly the Bill amended the *Family Responsibilities Commission Act 2008* by removing the sunset clause from the legislation; amending the definition of welfare reform community area to 'an area prescribed under regulation'; adding new justice triggers in regard to convictions in the District, Supreme and Children's Courts; amending the disqualification provisions for Local Commissioners; and requiring the FR Board to meet every six months rather than quarterly. The HCSC recommended the Bill be passed and on 14 October 2014 amendments to the Act were passed by the Queensland Parliament with bipartisan support and the Act was proclaimed on the 28 November 2014.

The recommendations released by the HCSC in its Report No 56 were principally in relation to the need for policy development as a result of the amended definition of a welfare reform community area to 'an area prescribed under regulation'. The explanatory notes for the amended definition of welfare reform community area state, "Deleting definitions of specific communities in the Act and utilising the Regulation would remove the need for more complex legislative processes when communities seek to join welfare reform or no longer require the FRC". With a clear understanding from the explanatory notes that it was the intention of the legislation to pave the way for future communities to opt-in, and for existing communities to opt-out, the HCSC proposed several recommendations in regard to policy development. Amongst other recommendations, the committee requested that the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs:

- ensure that information about the indicators and assessment methods to be used when considering whether to prescribe a community as a welfare reform community area be made available to community leaders and the public
- require the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs to: develop and publish guidelines for consultation with proposed new welfare reform community areas; and publish the outcomes of consultation with proposed new welfare reform community areas
- ensure that information about the indicators and assessment methods to be used when considering whether a welfare reform community area is ready to leave welfare reform is made available to community leaders and the public and
- provide details about the: arrangements that will be put in place to ensure a smooth transition for communities out of welfare reform; and measures that will be put in place to ensure that a former welfare reform community area continues to improve.

To date the Commission is unaware of any policy development work for communities to opt-in or out of Welfare Reform. The Commission considers that the future work of the FRC will be guided and driven by this policy development and strongly recommends that priority be given to meeting the recommendations of the HCSC.

CHALLENGES AND OUTLOOK



Administrative challenges

The Commission collects and reports on statistics derived from its operations to inform government policy. In late 2014 the Commission was advised that its Windows server would reach the end of support in the beginning of the 2015-16 financial year, rendering it subject to compliance issues and vulnerable to software and hardware incompatibility. The upgrading of the Windows server necessitated an upgrade to the Commission's CRM database. Subject to discussions held with DATSIP's information technology section and the Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation in regard to procurement options, the Commission signed a confidentiality agreement on 24 April 2015 with the preferred provider to prepare a scope of works for the upgrade of the database from CRM 4 to CRM 2015. The CRM upgrade project will be formally launched in late July 2015 when the project will be further defined in regard to execution, methodology, communications and reporting, risks and issues management, project timelines and decisions made on the CRM architecture and platform.

The Commission's priority is to strive for continuous improvement and it will continue to review how and what data is collected in order to better inform decision-making and evaluation.