

# REGISTRAR'S YEAR IN REVIEW



## From the desk of the Registrar

This year marks the seventh year for the Commission. Queensland's Welfare Reform initiative commenced in 2008 and as with previous years the Commission has seen many landmark developments both within and outside the Commission. During this reporting year there was a change of State government and therefore a change of ministerial responsibilities. The Honourable Curtis Pitt MP became the Treasurer, Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships on 16 February 2015. This annual report outlines the progress the Commission has already made in contributing to the Government's objectives for the community. It also recognises the ongoing work across the welfare reform communities throughout the past year.

Following an extensive consultation process the community of Doomadgee was prescribed as a welfare reform community area on 7 August 2014 and eight respected Doomadgee community members were appointed by the Governor in Council as Local Commissioners. The outcome of consultations demonstrated support for the Commission to address child safety concerns and school attendance. The new Local Commissioners were each subjected to rigid recruitment processes prior to appointment, after which each participated in intensive induction and training to prepare them for the important roles they will play in the Welfare Reform agenda. A large number of notices were received by the Commission from the then Department of Education, Training and Employment identifying children with a high level of non-attendance and the Commission commenced conferencing on 4 November 2014. As at the commencement of conferencing in term 4, school attendance was reported at 56.6 percent. For the 2015 school term Deputy Commissioner Curtin held conference sittings in Doomadgee on five occasions comprising a total of 10 conferencing days. Official statistics available from DET for Term 1 2015 show 59.8 percent attendance, a promising start to the school year, albeit without the ability of the Commission to income manage in the community as yet.

Although it is early days, the Commission believes the community's willingness to appear and be conferenced by Local Commissioners is reflective of an acceptance of the Commission. The Commission has been heartened by the support from the Doomadgee community and commends the Doomadgee Local Commissioners for their commitment, confidence, compassion and wisdom. They have displayed an understanding of the importance of welfare reform and conveyed this to clients attending conferences. There is little doubt that these Local Commissioners will play a vital role in the success of the Commission and welfare reform in Doomadgee.

From the commencement of the 2015 calendar year a review of expenditure was undertaken and major efforts made to cut current and projected expenditure. Additionally, due to the departure of the Registrar in December 2014, the Commissioner undertook a restructure of the Commission to reduce the cost of operations. As a result of this restructure I transitioned into the position of Registrar/General Manager on 1 January 2015, incorporating my functions of Human Resource and Policy Manager. Upon the departure of the Executive Officer (Management) in February 2015, the new position of Accountant was created and the Commission welcomed Andrea Cotten into this role. The Commission also welcomed Francesca Adams into the vacant position of Hope Vale Local Coordinator in January 2015 following the departure of Raymond Lennox.



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An operational summary of the past financial year demonstrates that, as with previous years, there has been a consistent and challenging workload with a total of 3,791 notices within jurisdiction received which resulted in 2,296 conferences held, 186 referrals made to service providers and 6.84 percent of clients on case plans as at 30 June 2015. A total of 238 Conditional Income Management orders were issued throughout the same period.

The Commission reported in its last annual report that following an independent evaluation of the CYWR trial released in 2012, the Institute sought an increase to the maximum rate of income management from the existing 75 percent to 90 percent. The increase was effected from January 2014 and the Commissioners have used the imposition of 90 percent income management as an additional tool to encourage those members of the communities who show significant resistance to measures already placed upon them to comply with orders. Of those clients placed on 90 percent income management, approximately 29 percent have subsequently had their orders reduced or revoked during the year. Income management has also been utilised as an incentive rather than a disincentive in regard to school attendance. At conference clients who are the subject of Income Management Orders are shown a pie graph of their child's attendance, and encouraged to increase their child's attendance in order to come off income management, or have it reduced. The Commissioners report that there has been a favourable response to this strategy.

School awards were held in December 2014 in each of the five communities. Prizes were provided for attendance achievements which the Local Commissioners proudly presented at each ceremony. This is an annual event for the Commission and we view these awards as providing positive recognition and support for those students (and their families) who regularly attend school, and also as an incentive for those students who wish to improve their attendance.

The Commissioners and FRC staff attended the annual Local Commissioner Development week in late May 2015. Progressively each year the Local Commissioners have become more proactively involved in this week and its activities, and have adopted leadership roles in negotiations and workshops. A full report of this week can be found at page 44. We are immensely proud of the development of the Local Commissioners and the building of local authority in each of their communities. Since the addition of s50A to the Act enabling the Local Commissioners to convene conferences in their own right, these conferences have increased from 106 in 2010-11 to 769 this financial year, and up from 219 in 2013-14. I commend the Local Commissioners for their dedication and leadership. The concept for the Commission was that it would be a statutory body which would empower local Indigenous people to take responsibility for the enforcement of the obligations and the rebuilding of social norms - delivered by Indigenous people for Indigenous people. The Local Commissioners have met this expectation admirably.

As previously stated, the Commission is in its seventh year, and except for two recent recruitments, the average length employed for a staff member is between four and five years. I acknowledge the dedication of all those who have joined our Commission family since its inception. We comment frequently on the work of the Commission in terms of its 'engagement' with the communities. I believe that term can also be used when referring to the staff who work for the Commission, staff who have made it possible to achieve what we have to date. Regardless of the position filled, each and every staff member has been entirely 'engaged' with their work at the FRC. They have been 'engaged' with our objectives, 'engaged' with the workload and 'engaged' with delivering service to the Commission and to our clients. It takes a team, and I consider myself fortunate indeed to have a very dedicated one.

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The Commission works in conjunction with stakeholders to fulfil its obligations under the Act. Their ongoing professional assistance and collaboration is also very much valued in terms of our external partners. DATSIP has worked tirelessly to assist the Commission in reviewing the Act in order to deliver better outcomes for welfare reform. I acknowledge their support and the support of other agencies in providing services to the communities. We expect that our combined efforts will continue to deliver significant outcomes, however, the Commission acknowledges that there remains the need to source further support programs to both enhance the effectiveness of existing delivery and to offer additional support services to tackle substance abuse, gambling and other dysfunctional behaviour.

Commissioner Glasgow has always been a hands-on strategic leader who has made the Commission the success that it is today. Having said that, the road is never smooth and the Commission has had to grow, change and challenge itself to meet the expectations of the communities it serves. Deputy Commissioner Rod Curtin has ably supported the Commissioner, establishing Doomadgee as a welfare reform community. I admire them both for their personalised style of leadership which does not give lip service to welfare reform, but enthusiastically embraces it.

**Maxine McLeod**

**Registrar and General Manager**



*Cairns based registry staff*