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Memorandum of Understanding

A Memorandum of Understanding was entered into on 29 June 2017 between the Australian Government, the State Government and the Commission to set out an agreed basis for funding, administration and reporting arrangements for the operations of the Commission in Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge for the period 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018. The Commission has since been advised that, in a letter received in March 2018 by DATSIP from DPMC, Australian Government funding for Commission operations has been approved for the period 1 July to 31 December 2018. A formal variation to the existing memorandum of understanding is awaiting finalisation.

CIM survey

A survey was completed during the first quarter of this fiscal year which sought voluntary feedback from Doomadgee FRC clients who were subject to CIM orders to record their views on the impact income management and the BasicsCard had had on their lives. Feedback was received via a survey questionnaire conducted over the period 21 June 2017 to 16 August 2017. Results of the survey revealed:

- Of the 55 clients subject to a CIM Order, 48 (87 percent) completed the survey, three (5 percent) were not contacted as they were out of community, three (5 percent) were not approached as they were observing Sorry Business, and one (2 percent) client declined to take part.
- 77 percent of clients surveyed reported that having the BasicsCard made their life better (46 percent said “a lot better” and 31 percent said “a bit better”).
- 88 percent of respondents believed that the BasicsCard would be beneficial to people who were using their money for things other than food and rent, and who then could not afford to pay for food and rent.
- 69 percent of respondents believed that having the BasicsCard made it easier to manage money.
- The least liked aspect of the BasicsCard was the restriction on what money could be spent on with respondents commenting on the inability to spend money on events such as the rodeo or at particular services and stores.
- 71 percent (30 of 42) of clients who commented mentioned having more food in the house as an outcome of the effect of the BasicsCard on their lives.
- Overall - 75 percent of clients surveyed reported that their experience of the BasicsCard was ‘Good’.

The Commission acknowledges the overwhelmingly positive response to the qualitative research survey and attributes this to a number of factors. The FRC commenced conferencing in Doomadgee in November 2014 without the ability to impose income management. Authorisation to commence income management came in March 2016, giving the Local Commissioners more than a year during which time they were able to engage with clients to sell the idea of income management, and to promote the possible benefits of the BasicsCard. Initial consultations held with the community prior to the introduction of the Commission in 2014 resolved that the Commission would conference on the triggers of Child Safety and Welfare notices and School Attendance and Enrolment notices only. Given that in the great majority

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of cases, the mother is listed as the primary carer, and is the person most often recorded as responsible for children on the school roll, it is the case that more females than males are conferenced in Doomadgee, and as a result, more women than men become subject to income management orders. In many cases it is also the women who are responsible for the management of the household, and survey result comments point to increased control over money, the availability of food and the ability to save as some of the positive outcomes of income management.

The Commission acknowledges the potential for bias arising from the use of FRC personnel in the collection of data, and the risk of positive response bias associated with the possibility that participants could feel unable to express their true opinion to FRC representatives without fear of potential consequences. The Commission does not claim that the small number of income managed clients surveyed and their responses is representative of the much larger number of income managed clients across the welfare reform communities, and their views. The survey and this resultant report are intended for internal use, as an informal and unofficial means to obtain the opinions of a small number of clients in one community in an attempt to gain some insight into how the BasicsCard was received.

Parliamentary Committee reports

On 14 February 2017 the Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Parliamentary Committee gained jurisdiction under Schedule 6 of the Standing Orders to oversee the Family Responsibilities Commission. The committee's oversight functions include:

- a) to monitor and review the performance by the entity of the entity's functions;
- b) to report to the Legislative Assembly on any matter concerning the entity, the entity's functions or the performance of the entity's functions that the committee considers should be drawn to the Legislative Assembly's attention;
- c) to examine the annual report of the entity tabled in the Legislative Assembly and, if appropriate, to comment on any aspect of the report; and
- d) to report to the Legislative Assembly any changes to the functions, structures and procedures of the entity that the committee considers desirable for the more effective operation of the entity or the Act which establishes the entity.

In August 2017 the committee presented Report number 52 on the oversight of the Commission, which highlighted issues for consideration by the Legislative Assembly. During this period the committee met with Commissioner Glasgow on three occasions to gain an appreciation of the Commission's work, assess the gains it has achieved to date and the challenges it continues to face. Only one recommendation was made in Report number 52. This recommendation stated that, "...Queensland Government service delivery departments which have a statutory relationship with the Family Responsibilities Commission consult with the Family Responsibilities Commission in regard to any proposed changes to operations and reporting that may impact the Commission". The recommendation was made in light of past operational and legislative changes that have affected the Commission's operations. The Commission acknowledges that DATSIP has since written to relevant departments reporting to the FRC in regard to this recommendation.

Of particular comment in the committee's report is their concern that sufficient consideration be given to succession planning for the FRC Commissioner and Local Commissioners in 2018. The committee acknowledged, "...the challenging work undertaken by the FRC, and is greatly



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impressed with the significant results which the FRC has achieved and is achieving in the welfare reform communities in which it operates. The FRC over its period of operation has built strong relationships within the welfare reform communities and has become a valuable conduit for the work of many Queensland Government service agencies”.

Following a Queensland general election held on 25 November 2017, and the swearing in of the Honourable Anastacia Palaszczuk MP as the Premier of Queensland on 12 December 2017, the Honourable Jackie Trad MP was appointed the Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. Due to this ministerial change, the Commission’s oversight Parliamentary committee transitioned from the Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Parliamentary Committee to the Economics and Governance Committee on 15 February 2018.

School attendance

Official term statistics are not received by the Commission until at least seven or eight weeks after the finish of the term. 2018 term 1 statistics were made available on 30 May 2018, 8.5 weeks after the close of the term. Further, no official attendance statistics are provided to the Commission during term (which lasts 10 to 11 weeks). The Commission is therefore forced to rely on information provided to its Local Coordinators in community who liaise with the local schools directly. The Commission often relies on unverified and unpublished school attendance figures to provide to its FR Board meetings during the year, a matter which is of some concern to the Commissioner.

Aurukun

Term 1 2018 overall attendance (54.2 percent) decreased from term 1 2017 (58.7 percent) by 4.5 percent. Despite this, the school is reported to have a very positive feel to it in 2018, and the large number of parents in the school grounds is a direct indicator of the improved relationship between the school and the community. School attendance is being addressed by all services across Aurukun. The Local Coordinator attributes the success that is being achieved to the regular interagency meetings the FRC is attending which have strengthened relationships between service providers, making it clear that school attendance is a community wide issue. The most successful initiatives in school attendance are community led, and the Aurukun Commissioners have stated that the local School Attendance Officer (SAO) team are the main voices leading the push to increase school attendance. The Commission can report that it has worked hard to strengthen its relationship with the Aurukun State School in 2018, and this has resulted in an enhanced sharing of information on the ground in community. The school has recognised and thanked the FRC for focusing 100 percent on school notices for the beginning of the term, and they report that this was instrumental in assisting them with their increased attendance from term 4 2017 (44.9 percent). The Commissioners are keen to continue prioritising education notices for future conferences.

Coen

Term 1 2018 attendance results for Coen were 93.0 percent, just 0.1 percent higher than for term 1 2017. This was a great result given the fact that weather conditions (including road closures) affected attendance for several weeks. The Department of Education reports that behavioural matters have reduced from 17 in term 1 2017 to four in term 1 2018. In response to a peak in behavioural matters last year:

- a Child Youth Mental Health Social Worker now visits the school on a fortnightly basis

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- the Department of Education funded program 'Be Well Learn Well' allied health team regularly visits Coen (also visiting the communities of Aurukun, Doomadgee and Hope Vale)
- QPS engage with the school and students on difficult behavioural matters
- Apunipima Wellbeing Centre Men's Group in collaboration with the CYP Parenting Program support parents of students engaging in behavioural concerns.

Doomadgee

Overall school attendance for term 1 2018 (62.6 percent) increased from term 1 2017 (58.9 percent) by 3.7 percent. Secondary school attendance for term 1 2018 (52.4 percent) increased from term 1 2017 (43.7 percent) by 8.7 percent. Doomadgee Commissioners have held a total of 189 conferences for school related matters which represents 95 percent of all conferences conducted in Doomadgee for term 1 2018. The SAOs at the school have acknowledged the valuable role the FRC plays in referring and encouraging parents and carers of school aged children to participate in classroom activities with their children. The Doomadgee State School staff appreciated the presence of the FRC on the school grounds and in the community in the first week of term 1 and feel this assisted in increasing the primary school attendance result for the first week of term. In an attempt to better engage with students the school has conducted a camp and has provided horsemanship and hospitality training.

The FRC has continued meeting with the SAOs every Monday morning to identify cohorts of students who are not regularly attending school, and discuss tailored strategies to engage these absent students. The school reports they have experienced an increase in parental participation rates. It is hoped these participation rates will continue to increase. Local Commissioner Eleanor Logan conducts regular staff and community discussion groups as the Centre Manager for the Doomadgee Child Care Centre, focusing on educating young parents and carers on the importance of continuing education beyond primary and secondary school.

Hope Vale

The Hope Vale campus of CYAAA recorded an attendance rate of 83.0 percent for term 1 2018, an increase of 7.3 percent from term 1 2017. The Commission dedicated the first week of sittings in Hope Vale to conference parents and carers of truant children from term 4 2017 in an effort to ensure term 1 2018 had a good beginning. Children with poor attendance and behaviour problems were placed on individual plans by a specialist teacher whose mandate is to reintegrate these children back into their classrooms. Reports are that this strategy has achieved some success to date. It is reported that behavioural incidents thus far are below average to those experienced in the past.

Mossman Gorge

Mossman Gorge community achieved an attendance rate of 78.1 percent in term 1 2018, an increase from term 1 2017 of 2.9 percent. There still remains a high number of disengaged youth in the Mossman Gorge area. Four out of the six high school students who started the year from Mossman Gorge remain in school, whilst the other two students are currently disengaged. The Mossman Gorge Commissioners have held a total of 17 conferences for school related matters during term 1 2018, which represents 63 percent of all conferences conducted. Mossman State Primary School has secured funding to employ a School Engagement Officer to follow up on students who do not present at school, encourage parent participation in student learning and identify any gaps in communication between the school and the home. The Mossman Gorge Wellbeing Centre Girls Group and the Mossman Youth Centre, in collaboration with the Girl Academy at Wangetti, are offering support for disengaged young females.



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Local Commissioner conferences

The exercise of Indigenous authority satisfies one of the Commission’s ‘Main Objects’ (Div 2, s4, *Family Responsibilities Commission Act 2008*), “...to help people in Welfare Reform community areas to resume primary responsibility for the wellbeing of their community and the individuals and families of the community”. Local Commissioners from Aurukun, Coen and Hope Vale have been sitting alone in conferences on the majority of occasions since 1 July 2017. The Commission has continued this focus for 2018, encouraging the Local Commissioners to sit in conference independently of Commissioner Glasgow and Deputy Commissioner Curtin. In meeting this objective, the 2018 sittings calendar was amended at the direction of Commissioner Glasgow to reduce the occasions on which he and the Deputy Commissioner attend conferences in each community.

Unfortunately Mossman Gorge has seen a reduction in the number of conferences conducted independently. The Mossman Gorge community only has three Local Commissioners, one of whom has obtained a significant position in Cairns. Attendance of the Commissioner has been required from time to time to obtain a quorum at the Mossman Gorge conferences. It should be noted that the percentage of conferences conducted by the Mossman Gorge Commissioners in 2016-17 was 81.22 percent.

Although the Doomadgee Commissioners have only been exercising their independent authority in conference since 23 January 2018, they have embraced their independent role with confidence, common sense and firmness. Local Coordinators in each of the communities have likewise stepped up to the challenge of coordinating client attendance and further supporting the Local Commissioners’ independence. Below is a table detailing the percentage of conferences conducted independently by the Local Commissioners for the period 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018.

Table 13: The percentage of conferences conducted with Local Commissioners sitting alone by community 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018.

Community	Conferences with Local Commissioners Sitting Alone	Total Number of Conferences Held	Percentage of Conferences with Local Commissioners Sitting Alone
Aurukun	1,049	1,069	98.13%
Coen	84	95	88.42%
Doomadgee	279	856	32.59%
Hope Vale	386	390	98.97%
Mossman Gorge	34	129	26.36%
Total	1,832	2,539	72.15%

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Possible Welfare Reform transition planning

In light of the potential transition of several welfare reform communities from Welfare Reform (subject to community and stakeholder consultations), the Commission was advised that DATSIP would partner with it to transition affected permanent public service employees into other public service employment.

Bearing in mind the Department of the Premier and Cabinet's Employment Security Policy (together with relevant State Government directives), and in order to ensure that the Commission undertakes every opportunity to offer career transition solutions by skilled career coaches should it be required, the Commission has enlisted the services of Lee Hecht Harrison (LHH). LHH offer one-on-one and group orientation sessions focused on providing individuals with a clear pathway to developing and documenting their career plan.

In May 2018 employees were given the option to access one-on-one career coaching to a maximum of two sessions. As the future becomes clearer, and subject to Australian and State Government policy, the Commission will ensure that all permanent public servants are supported through the program should organisational change be effected.

Community visit

On 10 January 2018, at the invitation of the Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council, Commissioner Glasgow, Local Commissioner Doreen Hart, and Acting Client Manager Anne Crampton travelled to Yarrabah to meet Council representatives. The Council were eager to obtain information on the FRC and its work in the welfare reform communities. The Commission delegation met with Deputy Mayor Michael Sands, Councillor Colin Cedric and CEO Janelle Menzies. An overview of the FRC and how it works was provided. The Council spoke about their local challenges and the need to seek alternative solutions to those presently being used. The meeting was a positive and frank exchange of views, and the Council sought to meet with the FRC again in the future along with community members. Commissioner Glasgow expressed the need for the Council to seek Government assistance should they wish to introduce an FRC or FRC type model in their community.

Mr Wayne Butcher, Mayor of the Lockhart River Aboriginal Shire Council, has also requested information and met with Commissioner Glasgow and Registrar McLeod seeking solutions to the challenge of improving school attendance in the Lockhart River community. An information pack was provided to the Mayor including how the Commission works, profiles of the Local Commissioners, the Commission's strategic overview and its School Attendance Guidelines. Mayor Butcher was encouraged again to seek Government assistance should the Council and community wish to introduce an FRC or FRC type model in their community.