



# COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

## WELFARE REFORM COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

The strategic partners in Welfare Reform, the Queensland Government, Australian Government and the Institute, are gathering information to inform a decision as to whether to continue with Welfare Reform and the FRC in their current state, whether to discontinue both, or whether an evolution of the concept should be carried forward to work on gains achieved to date in the welfare reform communities. Consultations were conducted by the partners in each of the communities commencing from 21 March 2018 to determine what benefits were attributable to Welfare Reform and the operations of the Commission, what disadvantages (if any) had occurred, what had not been achieved, an assessment or investigation as to why, and what the needs of each community were going forward. DATSIP has been tasked with producing a final report on the findings of the partners. It is anticipated that this report will inform the future of the Commission, and its Local Commissioners.

The community consultations, initially planned for the 2017 calendar year, were delayed by the timing of the Queensland State election. The consultations with the Local Commissioners occurred in each community over a period of one to two hours, and in the absence of the Commissioner. Local Commissioners in each community asked for the discussions to be recorded. Transcripts have been prepared at their request by the Commission and copies have been provided to each of the strategic partners on the express authority of the Local Commissioners.

As it is unlikely that the report and recommendations will be finalised prior to the end of this 2017-18 financial year, at the request of the Local Commissioners the Commission would like to publish some comments from them expressed during their direct consultations. These comments are a brief snapshot of their discussions, and will provide the reader with an insight into their views, the importance they place on their roles, how they perform their functions, how they assess the wellbeing of their communities, and their hopes for the future.

*"It's a bit like someone comes in with a little cut on their finger. Well, automatically we give them a bandage, but if it's a cut that's looking very serious you would say to them, 'you better go see the doctor'. Then the doctor may have a look at that cut and say, 'Oh, he might need surgery', so you go to the surgeon."*

*"They have the needle but no thread to sew."*

*"We need good leaders so they can develop good followers. Then those good followers can become good leaders. I've always said to people, 'If you want to be a good leader, a positive leader, talk to people. Talk to them, and when you walk in the lead and you look back and see plenty of people walking with you, you don't say that you're the leader of all those people. You just say you're a good educator because all of the mob behind you are leaders themselves'."*

Doomadgee Commissioner Chris Logan

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*“From the time that the FRC landed in community – just before that we had a lot of ups and downs, you know, like out in the street. Just out here they might be drinking and so forth, you know, but for now, seeing – that’s how I can describe it. It is working, and the proof is in the – I suppose the – what we see around us, you know.”*

*“So it’s a unique body. And it’s a unique design in how – how fire - you fight fire with fire, so to speak, you know”.*

*“I think that we need to be reminded that Welfare Reform has made a difference, and Welfare Reform is a vision of leaders in community. It wasn’t created from the top down; it was created from the bottom up.”*

**Mossman Gorge Commissioner Karen Gibson, OAM**

*“Well we’re only here for one thing; to make our community strong; to make sure they understand what’s right or wrong; and to support each other as Local Commissioners. We’re already a leader. We’re somebody to them.”*

**Mossman Gorge Commissioner Karen Shuan**

*“Before Welfare Reform came in people would struggle to buy food and that, because at that time we had - the tavern down the road was open, you know, because most parents were in there spending their money on grog and not buying food. Welfare Reform came in to Aurukun in 2008. It changed a lot of peoples’ lives.”*

**Aurukun Commissioner Ada Woolla, OAM**

*“Even though you might take this away from us ... we’re going to still be here. This is our community, and like I said, I am so tired of my community being a big laboratory ... we’re people with heartbeats, blood in our veins, and I’ve seen the bloodshed of my people. And now, I believe that Aurukun is in a good place at the moment. Yes, this community has its ups and downs, its problems, but I believe it’s in a good place – and that’s all I’d like to say.”*

**Aurukun Commissioner Keri Tamwoy**





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*"I just say it does give our community people the understanding that a conversation with the Commissioners, as Elders, can be of great benefit to them. And together we have brought understanding that problems can be mediated and resolved without always using force, threats or any violence."*

*"Two major things that we want to achieve within our community are: our children - give our children a good start in life; and work with government. And most of all, work to keep our community as clean as possible...we want tourists to pull up and say, you know, 'What a beautiful community'. We've got to take pride in our community, and we want to continue doing this."*

*But anyway, we thank you guys for being here. But one thing we need you to take away: the continuation of this program, it's not about us. It's about us, what we want to do for our community and for our children."*

Hope Vale Commissioner Victor Gibson, OAM

*"In the community we definitely need a group of Elders, for people to refer to, to come to, yeah. Without that I don't know; they'll probably still come to us but we won't be in our roles, you know, we'll have other things to do. When we're here, we're committed to be Commissioners."*

Hope Vale Commissioner Cheryl Cannon

*"What I would like to change – if we could bring in those clients who are not on welfare - that would give us an opportunity to talk to parents mainly in relation to education and schooling. I would like to see the FRC continue as I think there is a lot more we can do."*

Coen Commissioner Garry Port, OAM

The Commissioner absented himself for all these discussions. Commission staff recorded the events at the request of Local Commissioners and with the consent of all participating parties, and provided introductions, advice on community protocols and necessary housekeeping.