



LOCAL COMMISSIONER DEVELOPMENT WEEK

The Commission has over the years demonstrated a firm commitment to the professional development of the Local Commissioners. Each May since 2009, the Commissioners have travelled from their home communities to Cairns for a week of workshops, seminars and presentations aimed at increasing capabilities, building morale and sharing learnings with their colleagues.

The uncertainty of the future surrounding the FRC lent a particular significance to the 2018 Local Commissioner Development Week. The Commissioners gathered at the DoubleTree by Hilton hotel in Cairns commencing 8 May, with a sense of apprehension and the hope that the week would provide some answers.

Assistant Minister for Treasury Glenn Butcher, representing Minister Jackie Trad, officially opened the event, acknowledging and thanking the Commissioners for the work they do in their communities, and congratulating Commissioner David Glasgow for his ten years with the FRC. Traditional Owner Seith Fourmile gave a Welcome to Country.

Tuesday afternoon saw the Commissioners separate with the majority visiting Djarragun College where they were shown 'D Health', the school's onsite health and wellbeing centre.

The multidisciplinary medical facility, with doctors, psychologists, case managers, speech therapists and nurses is available to support the health needs of both students and their families. A tour of the college took the Commissioners to the school's Vocational Education and Training workshops and the girls' boarding facilities. The Commissioners then took part in a Pathways Culture lesson, where they introduced themselves and spoke to the students about their roles in community and the importance of education to the young, and encouraged them to remain flexible as they learned to walk in two worlds. The college provided a delicious afternoon tea where the Commissioners met with boarding students from their home communities.



Coen Commissioners Elaine Liddy, May Kepple and Alison Liddy, Kiara and Mickey Doolah, Mossman Gorge Commissioner Loretta Spratt and Coen Commissioner Garry Port at Djarragun College

Hope Vale Commissioners, at the invitation of the Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council, travelled to Yarrabah to meet with the Mayor, Councilors and members of the Yarrabah Leadership Group to provide an information session on the FRC and how it works. This was not the FRC's first visit to Yarrabah as community leaders explore options used in other regional areas to resolve issues around school attendance, youth and domestic violence.

With Welfare Reform, including the FRC, under review by both the Australian and Queensland Governments, leadership was a key focus of the 2018 Local Commissioner Development Week. Veronica Williams, a trainer from the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre in Canberra, delivered a dynamic day-long program aimed at building leadership and understanding of community, government and other external stakeholders. The program centred on the skills required to lead, communicate, engage and negotiate with a range of stakeholders from community members to politicians, service providers, government departments and large corporations. The program served to build upon the Local Commissioners' existing highly

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developed leadership skills and equip them with increased confidence in dealing with people in positions of influence.

An invitation to present at the Local Commissioner Development Week was issued to two speakers who had previously made an impact with their addresses at the National Indigenous Economic Development Forum in 2017. Jacob Cassady, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Mungalla Aboriginal Tours, attended and spoke to the Commissioners on the use of Aboriginal land for economic development. Jacob showcased Mungalla Station, an Indigenous owned and operated 2000 acre working cattle property near Ingham which uses cattle agistment, tourism, training and education and land management to generate income.

Jeremy Kee, CEO of Miwatj Employment and Participation (MEP) addressed the group on using Work for the Dole activities to generate income. The MEP model teaches how Work for the Dole activities can think and behave like businesses.

At the time of planning the Local Commissioner Development Week, DATSIP was in the process of conducting consultations as part of a review into the future direction of Welfare Reform and the FRC. DATSIP representatives requested the opportunity to attend and meet with the Commissioners. During a collegial and at times emotional consultation, Local Commissioners were unequivocal in their message - that if the government were to close down the FRC the situation in their communities would revert back to the way it was before the Commission started, and that ten years of hard work and gains made would be lost.

DSS also took advantage of the FRC Commissioners being gathered together in the one location and interviewed them as part of a review into income management with which DSS was tasked following the extension of Cape York income management from June 2017 to June 2019. Again, the Local Commissioners were clear in their claims that income management had been beneficial to their communities.

Noel Pearson assured the Commissioners in his address on Thursday afternoon that he would be doing everything in his power to secure a future for the FRC.

Local Commissioner Development Week is always a highlight in the FRC calendar. It is an opportunity for the Commissioners to come together, to consolidate relationships, share concerns and reach solutions, most often leaving with a renewed sense of solidarity. It would be fair to say that in 2018 the Local Commissioners left with more questions than answers.



*Mossman Gorge Commissioner Karen Gibson with Noel Pearson at the Local Commissioner Development Week
Commissioner Gibson had presented Noel with a portrait painting of himself*