



# Significant events and achievements

## Significant events

***The past fiscal year has seen a number of significant events which have impacted upon the internal operations and outlook of the FRC.***

### Statutory appointments July 2020 – June 2021

On 2 July 2020 the Queensland Governor in Council made significant appointments to the FRC for the period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021. These re-appointments included Tammy Williams as FRC Commissioner, Rodney Curtin as Deputy Commissioner, and all then current Local Commissioners for the communities of Aurukun, Coen, Doomadgee, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge. Additionally, three members of the Family Responsibilities Board were reappointed including Dr Chris Sarra, Mr Ray Griggs AO, and Mr Noel Pearson.

Of particular relevance to the Commission's operations was the appointment of Deputy Commissioner Rodney Curtin. Section 25 of the FRC Act provides that a Deputy Commissioner (if appointed) is to act as the Commissioner if (a) the Commissioner is not available to perform the Commissioner's functions; or (b) there is a vacancy in the office of the Commissioner.

The role has a significant frontline operational focus and has acted as a safeguard for business continuity in circumstances where workloads and competing priorities or unforeseen events (such a COVID imposed restrictions or illness) justifies the delegation of the Commissioner's decision-making powers to a Deputy Commissioner.

To give some historical context, the role of Deputy Commissioner has always been regarded as a critical element of the Commission's governance structure and operations. The early period of the Commission's operations required the appointment of **two** Deputy Commissioners<sup>1</sup>. From then on, the Commission's workload necessitated the continued re-appointment of at least one Deputy Commissioner (Rodney Curtin) to work alongside the FRC Commissioner until December 2018.

Deputy Commissioner Curtin's appointment has strengthened the FRC's stakeholder management and has enhanced efficiencies in our changing operational environment. It has assisted the FRC to achieve improved client outcomes, contributed to the quality assurance and robust oversight of Commissioner decisions which has resulted in a return on investment this financial year, and is a contributing factor to the FRC's outstanding performance outcomes. The reader is referred to a comprehensive breakdown of the volume of conferences held during the reporting period and client outcomes set out on pages 26 to 37.

### Tabling of 2019-20 Annual Report

The Commission is pleased to report that its Annual Report 2019-20 was tabled in the Queensland Parliament by the Honourable Craig Crawford MP, Minister for Seniors and Disability Services and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, on 3 February 2021 in accordance with the requirements of the FRC Act. Amongst other achievements the report documents a nearly five-fold increase from the previous financial year in client referrals from FRAs and Orders to community support services, evidence of the

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1. Appointment of the two Deputy Commissioners took effect on 22 July 2010. Mr Rodney Curtin was one of the Deputy Commissioners and he continued to be appointed for successive years until 31 December 2018.

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Commission's ability to support individual behavioural change. The FRC Annual Report 2019-20 can be accessed on the Commission's website: [www.frcq.org.au](http://www.frcq.org.au).

## Cashless Debit Card Summit

In November 2020 the FRC was invited to attend and present at a Cashless Debit Card Summit hosted by the Minderoo Foundation. The Summit brought together Indigenous community leaders, government representatives, service providers, community stakeholders and CDC participants from across Australia. With the advent of the transition from the BasicsCard to the CDC, it was an opportunity to share our experiences and learn about the new technologies attached to the CDC which were not available to FRC clients on the BasicsCard. This information helped inform the FRC's communications strategy with clients in preparedness for the successful transition to the CDC in March 2021.

Commissioner Williams and Registrar McLeod presented on the work of the FRC and elements of the FRC model – State based legislation involving local decision-making, and client centred decisions with a focus on supporting changed behaviour through referral pathways. The FRC received an enthusiastic welcome and all delegates expressed their interest in a model of income management unlike any other.

## Transition from the BasicsCard to the Cashless Debit Card

On 10 December 2020 the Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Continuation of Cashless Welfare) Bill 2020 passed both Houses of Parliament (the House of Representatives and the Senate) and received Royal Assent on 17 December. The Bill ensured the continuation of the CDC until 31 December 2022. It further allowed for the transition from the BasicsCard to the CDC in FRC communities with the Australian Government committing to maintaining the existing policy settings for Cape York Income Management as legislated in the FRC Act. The passing of this Bill has provided stability to the operations of the Commission and allowed the Local Commissioners to continue meeting the objectives of supporting the restoration of socially responsible standards of behaviour in FRC communities.

The FRC considers it particularly encouraging that the Bill expanded the element of voluntary participation to reflect the positive outcomes which are achievable from income management. A coordinated response from all levels of government is also necessary to ensure that the appropriate local supports are provided in conjunction with income management to improve social norms and the future of participating communities.

On 24 February 2021 the Social Security (Administration) (Cashless Welfare – Cape York Area) Determination 2021 was made by the Honourable Anne Ruston MP, Minister for Families and Social Services. The Determination gave effect as of 17 March 2021 to the transition of income management under the BasicsCard to the CDC in welfare reform community areas (as defined by section 8A of the FRC Act). The Commission is pleased the Australian Government sought to align the social security legislation with the FRC Act, determining that for subsection 124PD(1) of the *Social Security (Administration) Act 1999*, the Cape York area is to be the areas prescribed as a welfare reform community area under the FRC Act.



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The transition of FRC active income management clients from the BasicsCard to the CDC occurred seamlessly on 17 March 2021. Fortnightly meetings were conducted between DSS, Services Australia, the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) and the Commission to embed processes ahead of the transition. DSS utilised a systematic and methodical approach to ensuring all affected participants were contacted, employing several strategies including written correspondence, face to face remote service team engagement and outbound calls to ensure participants were aware of the changes and understood how they would be affected. Clients with high balances, recurring deductions, and payments due on the transition date were prioritised for contact. DSS provided information fact sheets explaining the transition and the differences between the BasicsCard and the CDC which made clear the benefits of the CDC over the BasicsCard. These fact sheets (along with FRC generated fact sheets) were distributed by the FRC Commissioners during conference to ensure clients were aware of the transition and were also distributed to non-income management clients, with the purpose of explaining the benefits that could be afforded through the CDC should they wish to participate on a voluntary basis.

Based on the Commission's experience and client feedback, the transition from the BasicsCard to the CDC was conducted by DSS and Services Australia – in partnership with the FRC and other community organisations such as the Cape York Partnership O-Hub – in an extremely professional manner and was well-received by the five welfare reform communities.

Whilst DSS officers were on the ground in each community during the transition period they received a significant number of requests from community members enquiring about participation in income management on a voluntary basis. The Commission already has processes in place to accept voluntary applications for income management pursuant to sections 106 and 108 of the FRC Act. To respond to this increased interest in voluntary income management from community members, the FRC implemented additional engagement strategies to identify, prioritise and process CDC VIM applications. This has resulted in a 350 percent increase in VIM agreements from quarter 50 (prior to the transition) to quarter 51 (during which the transition occurred). There has also been a further 272 percent increase in VIM agreements from quarter 51 (January to March 2021) to quarter 52 (April to June 2021).

## Local Commissioner Development Week

The Commission is committed to providing professional development to the Local Commissioners as required by the FRC Act under section 22 (Commissioner's functions) and section 35 (Registrar's functions). A Local Commissioner Development Week was conducted from 21 June 2021. Local Commissioners from each community travelled to Cairns and participated in:

- emotional intelligence training provided by Megan Bayliss of The Junk Wave – how to identify and regulate one's emotions and understand the emotions of others in order to build relationships, reduce team stress, defuse conflict and improve job satisfaction
- fraud and corruption training provided by the Crime and Corruption Commission – how to make safe and appropriate decisions in a complex social and cultural environment where lawful decisions are made by the Commissioners under a 'special measure' involving the antisocial behaviour of community members and
- domestic and family violence certificate training provided by the Cairns Regional Domestic Violence Service – how to understand what constitutes domestic violence, and how to understand and conference victims and perpetrators.

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The Commissioners were very pleased to attend this year as the advent of COVID-19 caused the cancellation of the 2019-20 Local Commissioner Development Week.

Discussions were held between the delegates and Apunipima on referral options for FRC clients for their health and wellbeing needs. Local Commissioners also had an opportunity to discuss their concerns with the Cape York Institute about the social impacts of long-term unemployment and under employment, and the need to create school and welfare-to-work solutions for young people. The week concluded with a round table discussion facilitated by Commissioner Williams to assess available data, identify achievements and set strategic priorities to best position the FRC for the future to meet the changing needs of clients.

## Achievements

In February 2021 the Commission undertook a longitudinal performance assessment of outcomes achieved with the support of our tripartite partnership and joint Australian and Queensland government investment since the commencement of its operations in July 2008 to July 2020. Outlined herewith are the key findings from that assessment which were provided to the Family Responsibilities Board, Ministers from the Queensland and Australian Governments, relevant key stakeholders and other interested parties.

### Evidence of community-level impact

According to the Collins Dictionary “a generation is the period of time, usually considered to be about thirty years, that it takes for children to grow up and become adults and have children of their own”. The FRC had been operating for less than half a generation at the time the longitudinal performance assessment was conducted (12 and a-half years) in the communities of Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge (and six and a-half years in Doomadgee), yet the data showed positive trends emerging in these communities. This suggests ***the broader reforms (of which the FRC is a key component working in partnership with community members and their families) are making progress to improve wellbeing and socio-economic outcomes in the welfare reform communities.*** In February 2021 the number of agency notices within jurisdiction received from reporting agencies over a period were analysed relating to community members not meeting pre-determined obligations.

The results regarding Child Safety and Welfare, Housing Tenancy and Court Notices follow:

- ***Child Safety – Indigenous children are safer and less likely to be removed to out of home care***

Notices for child safety investigations had decreased by 69 percent from the first six years of the Commission’s operations (2008-09 to 2013-14) to the following six years of the Commission’s operations (2014-15 to 2019-20). This achievement is contrary to the state-wide upward trend of notifications for Indigenous children.

The total number of notices from Child Safety Services (inclusive of investigations) had decreased by 11 percent over the same time series as above. In contrast the state-wide child protection trend for notifications is showing a continuous upward trajectory since 2015, notwithstanding the implementation of reforms following the Carmody Inquiry which highlighted the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system.



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- **Housing – Communities have increased housing stability**

Notices about residential tenancy agreements to tenants (for not complying with a remedy notice) had decreased by 32 percent from the first six years of the Commission's operations (2008-09 to 2013-14) to the following six years of the Commission's operations (2014-15 to 2019-20).

- **Criminal Justice – Downward trend in the instances of more indictable offences**

Notices for serious offences (District and Supreme Courts) had decreased by 23 percent when comparing the 2014-17 period to the 2017-20 period.

- **Socio-economic conditions in four of the FRC communities have improved or stabilised, whilst in comparable discrete communities, conditions have declined**

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) compiles a Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) product using census data and ranks Australian communities relative to their social economic advantage or disadvantage. The 2011 and 2016 SEIFA ratings for each of the original FRC communities were compared to reveal that Aurukun, Coen and Mossman Gorge have recorded an increase in their SEIFA rating with Hope Vale remaining stable.

A nexus between the value of FRC's mandated referrals and positive client behavioural change is provided by Cape York Partnership (CYP) who report that since 2014, and as at 30 November 2020, 239 clients have been referred to the MPower program by the FRC for financial support. CYP provided analysis undertaken on 133 of these clients who had completed their FRC case plans. CYP found that 91 percent of the 133 clients are reported to have attended either during and/or after their case plans had concluded. Significantly, 81 percent of these clients continued to engage with the O-Hub **after** their FRC case plan term had expired by choosing to access further O-Hub resources such as Parenting and Student Education Trust support, or continuing to engage with the MPower program on a voluntary basis. The data highlights in positive terms the willingness and motivation of clients to seek continued support which is indicative of an improved self-awareness and insight – elements necessary to facilitate long term behavioural change.