



# 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

### ***Reappointments July 2021 – June 2022***

On 30 June 2021 the Commission was advised by DSDSATSIP that the Governor in Council had approved the reappointment of Commissioner Williams as the FRC Commissioner for the period 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022. Further, to support the Commissioner in her role, Mr Rodney Curtin was reappointed as Deputy Commissioner, and all then current Local Commissioners for the communities of Aurukun, Coen, Doomadgee, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge were reappointed for the same period. Additionally, the chair of the FR Board changed from Dr Chris Sarra, Director-General of DSDSATSIP, to Mr Robert (Bob) Gee, Director-General, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF). The remaining two members of the FR Board Mr Ray Griggs AO, CSC Secretary of DSS and Mr Noel Pearson, Founder of CYI were reappointed for the period 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022.

### ***Reappointments July 2022 – June 2023***

On 6 May 2022 the Commission was advised by DSDSATSIP that the Governor in Council had approved the reappointment of Commissioner Williams as the FRC Commissioner for the period 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023. Further, to support the Commissioner in her role, Mr Rodney Curtin was reappointed as Deputy Commissioner, and all then current Local Commissioners for the communities of Aurukun, Coen, Doomadgee, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge (with the exception of Local Commissioner Victor Gibson of Hope Vale who did not seek reappointment) were reappointed for the same period. Additionally, the chair of the FR Board Mr Robert (Bob) Gee, Director-General, DAF and Mr Noel Pearson, Founder of CYI were reappointed to the FR Board for the period 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023. The third FR Board member, Mr Ray Griggs AO, CSC Secretary of DSS, did not seek reappointment and was replaced by Ms Jody Broun, Chief Executive Officer, National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA).

### ***New appointments***

At the FR Board meeting held on 4 November 2021, the Commission presented a paper to board members requesting approval to recruit further Local Commissioners in each community. The request was made as the Commission had on frequent occasions experienced difficulty in securing the attendance of three Local Commissioners to meet the requirements of holding s50A conferences. Additionally, the Commission wished to provide greater diversity amongst the pool of Local Commissioners currently appointed in regard to gender, age, clan affiliation and expertise.

In March 2022 the Commission forwarded 12 new Local Commissioner applications for consideration for the communities of Aurukun, Doomadgee, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge. On 30 May 2022, the Commission received advice from the Minister for Seniors and Disability Services and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships that, in accordance with the FRC Act, 12 new Local Commissioners (three from Aurukun, three from Doomadgee, one from Hope Vale and five from Mossman Gorge) had been appointed by the Governor in Council for the period 5 May 2022 to 30 June 2023. The new Local Commissioners will commence induction and training early in the 2022-23 financial year.

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## Tabling of 2020-21 Annual Report

The Commission is pleased to report that its 2020-21 Annual Report 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 1 February 2022 in accordance with the requirements of the FRC Act. The FRC Annual Report 2020-21 can be accessed on the Commission's website: [www.frcq.org.au](http://www.frcq.org.au).

## Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

In late February 2022, advice was received from DSDSATSIP that agreement had been reached between Minister Crawford and the then Hon Ken Wyatt AM, to fund the FRC for a two-year period, from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2023. The MoU was signed by all parties and executed on 11 March 2022. Noting the impact of funding uncertainty on the FRC's operations, the Commission is pleased to have the formal funding agreement in place until 30 June 2023, and to be able to provide a measure of stability to clients, Local Commissioners and registry staff.

## Community Support and Services Committee

On 28 March 2022, Commissioner Williams, along with Registrar Maxine McLeod and Executive Officer (Finance) Tracey Paterson, appeared at a Public Briefing of the Community Support and Services Committee of the Queensland State Parliament.

Commissioner Williams reported to the Committee on:

- the operational performance highlights outlined in the recently tabled Annual Report
- the MoU for funding and the impact of successive short-term funding agreements on the Commission's operations
- the history of external scrutiny of the FRC and potential data limitations in the context of the Future Directions Review, and
- the importance of operationalising the Childrens Court trigger in the FRC Act.

## Local Commissioner Development Week

The Commission is committed to providing professional development to the Local Commissioners as required by the FRC Act under sections 22 (Commissioner's functions) and section 35 (Registrar's functions). A Local Commissioner Development Week was conducted from 23 to 27 May 2022. Local Commissioners from each community travelled to Cairns and participated in:

- motivation and empowerment training and
- motivational interviewing techniques.

Motivational interviewing is a communication style which sits between following (listening) and directing (giving advice) and is designed to empower people by drawing on their own capacity for change. The motivational interviewing technique is a valuable tool to assist the Local Commissioners to help people find the motivation to make a positive behaviour change. These skills are intrinsic to the Commissioners and fundamental to the conferencing process.



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DSS held an information session on Income Management (IM) and the CDC, specifically in FRC communities. The presentation covered the background of income management, differences in IM models, and comparisons of the features of the CDC against the BasicsCard. Some meaningful information included the areas of responsibilities specific to DSS, Services Australia, Indue and the FRC.

Transition Support Services (TSS) informed the Commissioners on assistance available for students who are required to leave home in order to complete secondary schooling. TSS is a service which assists students from remote communities in Cape York to transition into boarding school and residential facilities throughout Queensland. Services include assistance with placement at boarding school, support for families of students, including financial help for familiarisation visits to potential schools, and the support of a TSS presence at airports for transiting students.

Two experts in Criminology and Criminal Justice Studies from James Cook University delivered lectures separately addressing the over-representation of Indigenous young people in the juvenile justice system and the problem of youth crime in Far North Queensland, with a focus on Townsville as a current hot spot.

The Department of Justice and Attorney General held an information session on Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) services funded in Far North Queensland and what future funding could look like. Information was provided in regard to the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce's report 'Hear her voice' and the Queensland Government's response to some of the 89 recommendations. This presentation expanded awareness on DFV generally, its impact on the community and what support services are needed to address this increasing social problem.

The final presentation was on Cape York Employment's delivery of NIAA's funded Community Development Program in Aurukun and Coen. The presentation also advised on employment pathways, training and job readiness programs in those two communities.

It is important in each Local Commissioner Development Week that time is set aside for the Commissioners to participate in a 'round table', a time when Commissioners come together to discuss current issues affecting the Commission and the FRC communities. It provides an opportunity for Commissioners to contribute their perspectives and ideas in a supportive environment. This year the Commissioners were joined by Mr Bob Gee, Director-General for DAF, Government Champion for Doomadgee and Chair of the FR Board. Mr Gee listened intently as Commissioners spoke of their frustration and despair at the ongoing high level of uncertainty around funding arrangements between the Australian and Queensland Governments for the FRC, and their sense of apprehension leading into the 'FRC Future Directions Review' including the role and future of the FRC.

The Local Commissioner Development Week is a highlight in the FRC calendar. It is the only time where Local Commissioners from the five widespread FRC communities are provided the opportunity to join together to receive training, share their experiences, support each other and build relationships. Last but not least, the Local Commissioners are afforded an opportunity to experience a brief respite from the burdens they carry every day in the communities in which they live.

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## Gambling harm minimisation

On 22 February 2021 the FRC made a submission to the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Fair Trading of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General as part of the consultation process for the Gambling Harm Minimisation Plan for Queensland 2021-2025. Following this submission on 20 August 2021 the Commission received correspondence from the Office thanking the Commission for the feedback in relation to gambling activities in the five welfare reform communities, noting that our *“personal experiences and views have been important in helping to shape the final version of the plan”*.

The Gambling Harm Minimisation Plan for Queensland 2021-2025 shows consistencies between the FRC’s submission and elements of the high-level plan such as:

- recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons and communities are an at-risk group
- as a strategic risk it is recognised that there is *“potential for increased harmful gambling behaviours due to the impacts of COVID-19”* and
- in order to achieve its vision of working together to prevent and minimise gambling harm to individuals, families and Queensland communities, the Plan seeks to deliver this through four strategic pillars:
  - Leadership and culture – by *“creating a strong mandate, identifying and encouraging leadership and grass roots level engagement”* and developing *“information, tools and services tailored for general, at-risk and high-risk populations”*.
  - Technology and environment – by *“transitioning to safe cashless environments”* (note: our submission addressed the proactive use of income management and its benefits).
  - Public Health Approach – by *“interventions addressing specific needs of ‘at risk’ communities”*.
  - Regulatory Framework – by *“taking a local and national approach to regulation”* (note: our submission addressed the need for the use of local by-laws to prohibit certain forms of gambling activities such as card games because the state regulatory framework does not adequately address this).

Although the Commission was only one of a number of stakeholders to make a submission, and further noting that aspects of the Plan are fairly generic and possibly could have also been issues raised by other stakeholders in their submissions, it is nonetheless pleasing to see consistencies between the Commission’s position and that of the Attorney-General’s department. The Commission is committed to look for opportunities to link the work of the FRC with the objectives of the Gambling Harm Minimisation Plan. Specifically, the FRC would welcome the opportunity to discuss with the Queensland Government the development of a statutory trigger to enable the FRC to better support community members who are exhibiting anti-social behaviours caused by problematic gambling.



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## Achievements

### Intensive Case Management Framework (ICM)

Advice was received in January 2022 from key stakeholders in the five welfare reform communities regarding the impact of the COVID-19 Omicron variant in each community, and the continuing need for the FRC to provide support to community members – including those whose vulnerability was further exacerbated by the public health emergency – to resume primary responsibility for their own and family members' wellbeing. It became clear that some issues faced by vulnerable clients would be heightened by the outbreak and the inaccessibility of other support services. Indeed, many community support services were not operating face-to-face during the Omicron outbreak, and some were not operating at all.

In early 2022, whilst conferencing was suspended due to the Omicron wave of COVID-19, the FRC developed an ICM framework. The goal of the ICM framework is to better utilise the Commission's existing case management powers under the FRC Act and provide an increased level of oversight and assistance to vulnerable clients who may benefit from an increased level of support in the absence of the conferencing environment. Clients were identified and prioritised collaboratively between the registry staff and Local Commissioners. Together with registry staff and Local Registry Coordinators, Local Commissioners began working intensively with a small group of clients in each community who were in need of immediate support to identify specific needs and implement plans to have those needs met. Ongoing support and coordination were then provided for these clients.

Local Commissioners report that encouraging clients to be part of the ICM framework assisted to further build a trusting and supportive relationship with clients and service providers. Because the ICM interactions occurred outside the more formal conference setting, it reinforced the supportive nature of FRC interventions. Clients reported valuing the assistance offered by the ICM framework, as many other services were not in community offering face-to-face support. The increased connections made with clients during home visits, and the fact that FRC staff and Commissioners were visible in community, not only connected clients and services, but also contributed to the increased conference attendance reported during quarter 55.

### Increased duties for Local Commissioners

As a result of the temporary suspension of normal conferencing during January and February 2022, and the contemporaneous need for increased community support, the EMT considered and approved Local Commissioners to undertake a broader range of administrative duties. These duties included serving notices to attend conference (once conferencing recommenced) and conducting ICM engagements, along with other administrative activities to ensure business continuity.

The performance of additional duties was approved on a case-by-case basis after a careful risk versus needs assessment. The COVID-19 risk was continually balanced against the need for supporting vulnerable FRC clients. The cost of additional duties performed by Local Commissioners was met from within existing budget allocations.

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## **Building better partnerships**

In order for the FRC legislation to operate effectively and to ensure Commissioners had all the information available to them to enable quality decision-making, the Commission entered into discussions with the Department of Education (DET) during September 2021 to draft an Exchange of Information Guideline to provide guidance in the principles that apply to information exchange regarding school attendance and enrolment information, and the method to be adopted in the exchange of information. The new procedures were adopted and implemented during quarter 54. The Commission is pleased to report that the new procedures, negotiated with DET, have resulted in the availability of timely and relevant information which has streamlined the conferencing of education notices.

## **Numbers of children protected by income management**

It is interesting to note a 'point in time' report demonstrating the protective benefits provided by income management in regard to young people. As at 30 June 2022, the Commission had 33 clients on CIM who were responsible for 48 children in their care (39 of whom were school aged children). Additionally, the Commission had 75 clients on VIM who had 66 children in their care (41 of whom were school aged children). Therefore, of the 108 clients being income-managed who had children in their care as at 30 June, 114 children were receiving the benefit of their caregivers being connected to additional services and supports to encourage spending on priority needs, to alleviate financial hardship, and to reduce the amount of income available to be spent on items such as alcohol, gambling products or from the withdrawal of cash to be spent on those items. This is an example of the broader impact the FRC has on community members within its jurisdiction.