

Community operations Aurukun



FRC operations in Aurukun were undertaken by Local Commissioners Edgar Kerindun, Doris Poonkamelya, Ada Woolla, Dorothy Pootchemunka, Vera Koomeeta, Keri Tamwoy and Dereck Walpo, supported by Local Registry Coordinators Cara Marks and Willy Smith. An account of their operations during the reporting period follows.

Aurukun Commissioners' report

As the Aurukun Local Commissioners we carry out our responsibilities with deep pride and a genuine commitment to the wellbeing of our community. Our work is driven by a shared vision of positive change and we remain committed in our belief that true leadership begins with accountability, respect and service to our people.

We engage across all levels of the community, from individuals and families to service providers and local organisations, fostering relationships built on trust and mutual respect. By consistently showing up, listening and working alongside community members, we are strengthening the foundations for long-term change.

Our approach promotes self-determination, empowering community members to take control of their own lives while being supported on the journey. The positive response we have received from the community reflects a shift in mindset and a growing trust in the process.

This shift is evident in the increased number of people voluntarily accessing support services and choosing to participate in income management. These actions speak to the success of our engagement strategies and demonstrate that community members are not only open to support, but they are also actively seeking it. Such voluntary participation is a clear indication that we are moving in the right direction.

Together we are creating a pathway forward; one that respects culture, promotes healing and builds a stronger, more resilient Aurukun.

Significant achievements

- In 2023-24 with the implementation of client engagement at the start of the 2024 calendar year, we recorded 267 client engagement activities for the remaining six months of the financial year relating to 147 clients. In 2024-25 we have increased this number substantially with a total of 993¹ client engagement activities relating to 398² clients.
- Voluntary agreements increased by 32%, from 108 in 2023-24 to 143 in 2024-25. This increase can, in part, be attributed to the Client Engagement approach.
- Conference attendance rose from 62% in 2023-24 to 70.2% in 2024-25, the highest it has been in the last seven years when a conference attendance rate of 70.3% was achieved in 2017-18

-
1. This figure records the total number of all client engagement activities undertaken in Aurukun by the FRC to support clients outside of conference. These activities include both contact and non-contact activities. Of these, 8 instances were related to administrative support, such as preparation for upcoming client engagements and 107 instances involved unsuccessful attempts to engage with a client for the following reasons: medical, no longer living in community, not suitable time, out of the community, in prison, sorry business, substance affected/aggressive and unable to locate.
 2. This figure records the total number of Aurukun community members identified with a client engagement activity outside of conference inclusive of contact and non-contact activities.



Community operations Aurukun

- Child Safety and Welfare notices within jurisdiction decreased from 150 in 2023-24 to 82 in 2024-25 – a decrease of 45%
- Domestic Violence Breach notices within jurisdiction decreased from 63 in 2023-24 to 42 in 2024-25 – a decrease of 33%
- Magistrates Court notices within jurisdiction decreased from 1,203 in 2023-24 to 718 in 2024-25 – a decrease of 40%.

Challenges

Community conflict

Ongoing community conflict continues to impact our ability to safely and effectively undertake our work. At times safety concerns, particularly related to alcohol misuse, and the presence of weapons, limit our capacity to engage with clients as intended. Without an operating drug and alcohol program in community opportunities for culturally grounded healing are lost. Persistent conflict within the community has far reaching consequences, contributing to increased incarceration, disrupting community development efforts and creating an environment where progress is difficult to sustain. We continue to support our community by encouraging mediation and the use of wellbeing support services. Our focus is to support changed behaviour and to encourage our people to be the leaders in their future.

Sorry business

Our community continues to experience compounding sorry business. With each individual passing, observing cultural protocols and the resultant closure of land and waterways has an immense impact on the entire community regardless of clan group. This is a heavy burden and is disruptive to our operations requiring us to alter the way in which we undertake our work. We believe our work is even more important at times of sorry business as we move respectfully around the community, working with our clients to offer support at a time when they are most vulnerable.

Other community matters

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (ATSILS) project

We have been working closely with ATSILS to support community members as they navigate the court process. Through this partnership we are able to share valuable information about the positive steps individuals have taken and their willingness to seek help and engage with support services in their efforts to change behaviour. The collaboration ensures the court has knowledge of the broader context of a person's journey, highlighting their commitment to accountability and personal growth. The aim of this project is for the FRC to work towards the Closing the Gap target to reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island adults held in incarceration and reduce penalties that clients receive for their matters.

Elder abuse

In April 2025, Local Commissioner Doris Poonkamelya and Local Registry Coordinator Cara Marks joined the FRC's Manager of Compliance and Legal Policy, Camille Banks, appearing

Community operations Aurukun



before the Education, Arts and Communities Committee, for Queensland Parliament's inquiry into Elder Abuse in Queensland.

We spoke of our work with vulnerable elderly community members and our view that the most prevalent form of elder abuse experienced in Aurukun is financial. The lack of banking facilities and the acute pressure to support family members leaves elders at risk of not having the means to provide for themselves. We hope that our appearance at the inquiry, and the learnings we shared will provide insight into ways to better support elders in remote Indigenous communities.

The next 12 months

Client Engagement

As Local Commissioners we are deeply committed to seeing our community members succeed and thrive. Our belief is self-determination, the right of our people to make decisions for themselves, guided by their values, strengths and aspirations. Supporting self-determination means listening to our community members, walking alongside them, and creating space for them to grow. We empower our clients with the tools, and support them to take the lead in their journey. We will continue to work alongside our community in client engagement, with open conversations and shared insight being the future of our work.

Justice

For too long our people have been over-represented in the justice system and jails. This is a reality we can no longer accept and we are committed to working for better outcomes that keep our people out of the justice system and connected to their families, culture and community. Reducing incarceration isn't just about justice, it's about restoring hope, dignity and opportunity to our people.

Youth Justice

Following the re-commencement of the provision of Childrens Court notices to the FRC in March 2025, we look forward to using the youth justice trigger to enable us to engage with young people at the most appropriate opportunity. In doing so, we aim to support better decision making, strengthen relationships and ultimately improve outcomes for young people and their families. This trigger reflects our commitment to restorative supportive practices that place young people at the centre of positive change. Working with our partners in community and supporting the future of our community is one of our highest priorities.

Release Monitoring Group

Our involvement with community members throughout their justice journey is important. The Release Monitoring Group is an integral part of a person's reintegration back into community following release from incarceration. The aim of the group is to support a return to community in a positive, supportive manner, to give our people the best possible start back home. Working with the group allows for the exchange of information pertinent to individuals, and insight into needs identified whilst incarcerated. Without support in place, our people are at risk of recidivism and we are delighted to have the opportunity to assist our clients. We will continue to support our people in a positive way as they navigate their return to community, with our aim being to work towards ensuring our adults and young people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system.