

Significant events and achievements



Significant events

The past financial year has seen a number of significant events which have impacted on the operations of the FRC.

Hearing of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights Inquiry into Compulsory Income Management

As noted in the 2023-24 FRC Annual Report, the Commission made a detailed submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights (PJCHR) Inquiry into Compulsory Income Management. The Commissioner was invited to appear as a witness to the inquiry at a public hearing on 5 July 2024.

Commissioner Williams and Camille Banks, Manager, Compliance and Legal Policy, travelled to Canberra to appear at the hearing in person. The PJCHR, Chaired by Mr Josh Burns MP, asked questions regarding the FRC's process, the proportion of income management administered by the FRC that is voluntary, as opposed to conditional, the measures of success of the FRC, and the availability and effectiveness of support services. Providing evidence at the hearing was an important opportunity for the FRC to explain the FRC's model and demonstrate the positive results that have been achieved with the FRC's proportionate and locally applied model of income management.

During the remainder of the hearing, several witnesses made reference to and showed interest in the FRC's unique model of income management. The FRC's submission and testimony to the inquiry was highlighted as an alternative to other models of income management that have blanket application.

Education, Arts and Communities Committee

Education, Arts and Communities Committee visited Hope Vale on 25 February 2025

The Education, Arts and Communities Committee has been assigned oversight responsibility for the FRC by Schedule 6 of the Standing Orders, and has responsibilities pursuant to Standing Order 194A to:

- monitor and review the FRC's performance of its functions
- report to the Legislative Assembly on any matter concerning the FRC, its functions or the performance of its functions the committee considers should be drawn to the Legislative Assembly's attention
- examine the FRC's annual report and, if appropriate, to comment on any aspect of the report
- report to the Legislative Assembly any changes to the functions, structures and procedures of the FRC the committee considers desirable for the more effective operation of the FRC or its Act.



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The following is an excerpt from the report on the committee's visit to Hope Vale and Cooktown with the Family Responsibilities Commission, tabled in the QLD parliament.¹

The committee resolved in January 2025 to visit Hope Vale and Cooktown, at the invitation of the Family Responsibilities Commissioner, Tammy Williams. The committee agreed that the learnings to be garnered from the visit would inform the committee's understanding of the unique role of the Family Responsibilities Commission (FRC) and would provide a foundation for the committee's oversight of the FRC.

Commissioner Tammy Williams extended an invitation to the committee to join her on a visit to Hope Vale and Cooktown, as part of the committee's oversight responsibilities of the FRC, as set out in Schedule 6 of the Standing Orders.

The Commissioner invited the committee to meet with Local Commissioners in Hope Vale and observe key FRC activities including FRC Client Conferences and Client Engagement (CE) sessions. The Commissioner suggested the committee join a Justice Reinvestment roundtable discussion with the FRC and staff of the Cape York Institute.

While in Hope Vale members of the committee visited the Hope Vale Opportunity Hub (O-Hub), a referral centre to support clients with tools to take responsibility for their personal finances, health and family expenses. The committee also visited the Hope Vale Wellbeing Centre to learn of its support programs.

The committee visited two state schools in Hope Vale and Cooktown to meet with students and teachers: Cooktown State School (P – 12) and the Hope Vale Campus of the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy (P – 6).

Meetings with the FRC

FRC Hope Vale Local Commissioners and staff

The committee met with Commissioner Williams, Local Commissioners Erica Deeral, Priscilla Gibson, and Selina Kerr-Bowen at the Hope Vale Business Precinct. The committee also met with FRC staff, including Hope Vale Local Registry Coordinator Kate Gooding.

Topics of discussion included:

- *the role of Local Commissioners*
- *Client Conferences*
- *Client Engagement processes, to better empower members of the community in decision-making*
- *Voluntary Income Management, trends and outcomes*
- *recent changes to the FRC Act on 22 August 2024 in relation to the issuing of court notices about young offenders.*

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The group was joined by a local Queensland Police Service liaison officer. Discussion topics included:

- *the challenges of staff retention and housing*
- *employment and training opportunities for community members, especially local tradespersons on the construction of state housing in the local area for police and teachers*
- *trends in domestic and family violence and the FRC response, including intervention to refer clients to appropriate services*
- *school attendance of local children.*

Members of the committee were fortunate, with the permission of FRC Local Commissioners and members of the community participating, to observe a small number of FRC Client Conferences.

FRC and Cape York Institute

The committee joined a Justice Reinvestment roundtable discussion with staff from the FRC and representatives from the Cape York Institute.

Topics discussed included:

- *community projects*
- *service delivery challenges*
- *skilling workers and employee screening*
- *education outcomes for young people*
- *over-representation of community members in the criminal justice system and ways to mitigate the imbalance*
- *strategies to 'Close the Gap' for members of the Hope Vale community*
- *rehabilitation programs for young people and programs to support people newly released from custodial sentences.*

For Commissioner Williams' response to Questions on Notice from the committee's visit to Hope Vale please see the Challenges and outlook section of the annual report.

Tabling of the 2023-24 Annual Report

The Commission's Annual Report for 2023-24 was provided to the Hon Leeanne Enoch MP, former Minister for Treaty, Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts on 21 October 2024. On 6 March 2025 the Family Responsibilities Commission's Annual Report for 2023-24 was tabled by the Honourable Fiona Simpson MP, Minister for Women and Women's Economic Security, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships and Minister for Multiculturalism in the Queensland Parliament.



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Achievements

Childrens Court ‘Trigger’ reinstated by the *Queensland Community Safety Act 2024*

The FRC has reported numerous times in the quarterly reports and other reports on the need to operationalise the Childrens Court ‘trigger’ again. It is with great pleasure that we can report that on the 22 August 2024 the Queensland Parliament passed an amendment to the FRC Act, as part of the Queensland Community Safety Bill (the Bill) to reinstate the Childrens Court trigger.

Since the issue was again raised with the Family Responsibilities Board at their board meeting on 20 February 2024, the Commission worked closely with the then Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts (DTATSIPCA), to advocate within government for the reinstatement of the Children’s Court trigger.

This work occurred in tandem with the FRC’s public submissions to the Youth Justice Reform Select (YJRS) Committee on 15 March 2024, and then to the Community Safety and Legal Affairs Committee on 16 May 2024. The submissions argued for an amendment to be made to the FRC Act as part of the Community Safety Bill (the Bill) that progressed some of the initiatives identified by the YJRS Committee. With the support of Kathy Parton, Deputy Director-General, and Clare O’Connor, (then) Director-General of DTATSIPCA, along with former Minister Leeanne Enoch, the amendments requested by the FRC were included in the Bill which was debated and passed on 22 August 2024.

The Explanatory Notes to the Bill acknowledge that the amendments represent the reinstatement of an existing power, and that they are in accordance with the original policy intent of the Childrens Court trigger. The Explanatory Notes also set out that reinstatement of court advice notices for young offenders will enable the FRC to intervene effectively and provide the support or referral of services to families of repeat offenders to address environmental factors that may have contributed to the young person’s offending behaviour.

The FRC has undertaken work to implement the necessary administrative and operational changes that were required to start receiving and dealing with Childrens Court advice notices. The FRC wished to ensure that all Local Commissioners had the opportunity to receive appropriate training, and to ensure the readiness of service providers, other community stakeholders and clients for this change in the FRC’s operations.

The Commission particularly wishes to acknowledge the work of then DTATSIPCA officers under the leadership of Kathy Parton to ensure the amendments were included in the Bill in a very short time frame. The FRC also acknowledges the important part played by the Alliance of Guguu Yimithiir People of Hope Vale, by resolving to support the reinstatement of the Childrens Court trigger and promoting that resolution.

The Local Commissioners have also shown unwavering commitment and determination to see this critical issue through to its resolution. The resilience they have shown to keep taking opportunities to advocate for the youth justice trigger, year after year, in the service of their young people, cannot be understated. Their continuing strength and resolve on this issue demonstrates real local authority and self-determination at work. The FRC also acknowledges the ongoing work of all FRC staff to continue promoting and working towards this important amendment.

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The amendment to the FRC Act is the culmination of more than eight years of advocacy, negotiations and hard work by FRC staff, Local Commissioners, and community stakeholders to seek a legislative resolution to the issue that has rendered the FRC unable to properly support young offenders and their families since 2016. The Commission looks forward to effectively implementing the Childrens Court trigger in each of the five FRC communities to assist in changing the trajectory of the lives of young people.

Information Communications Technology (ICT) upgrade

The FRC is undertaking an upgrade of its CRM system and ICT infrastructure. This upgrade is essential to assist with development of an enhanced performance framework, comply with QLD government cyber security requirements, enhance information security, minimise risks associated with software being out-of-warranty and to ensure it is fit-for-purpose for keeping official conference outcome records and data analysis.

Following the release of a Request for Quote (RFQ) on 17 December 2024, the FRC undertook a structured procurement process consistent with Queensland Government procurement policy. The RFQ closed on 3 February 2025 and attracted significant interest, with over 100 downloads by nearly 80 organisations and multiple vendors requesting meetings to better understand how the CRM is used.

Ten submissions were received and reviewed by the internal evaluation panel. As part of the process, the FRC sought feedback from relevant government agencies, including DWATSIPM, the Department of Families, Seniors and Disability Services and the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA). Their input helped confirm that the evaluation approach was appropriate, impartial, and in line with best practice.

After individual assessments and follow up meetings with shortlisted suppliers, a preferred vendor was selected. The chosen supplier demonstrated a clear understanding of FRC's requirements and the ability to deliver all core elements of the upgrade, including integrations.

Since selection, the vendor has completed preparatory upgrades and established a sandbox environment, where the new Dynamics 365 system is being configured. Current work is focused on redeveloping custom plugins, updating JavaScript components, and rebuilding system integrations.

The project remains on track, and as previously advised, all development is occurring in a separate environment to ensure there is no impact to daily operations.

Accounting software replacement

The FRC accounting software system is now outdated, inefficient and labour intensive, falling short of effectively meeting the accounting needs of the Commission. During the 2023-24 financial year additional audit issues with the current system were identified prompting approval to initiate a project aimed at assessing the FRC's accounting functional requirements and exploring alternative software solutions.



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A leading Australian audit and accounting organisation were engaged to support the FRC with the process of documenting the Commission's requirements and supporting the implementation of a replacement system. The FRC's functional requirements were distributed to potential suppliers who were invited to provide a submission, and an Accounting Software Evaluation Panel was established to evaluate and assess the submissions.

A successful supplier was identified and approval to proceed to implementation was granted by the Commissioner at the end of May 2025.

The new accounting software system is expected to be implemented during the 2025-26 financial year.

Office relocation

The Cairns registry has operated from the same office location since its inception in 2008. The size and facilities of the existing registry have long since been inadequate to meet the Commission's evolving needs and requirements. However, the history of the FRC has been marked by significant uncertainty, largely driven by short term funding agreements and government reviews and inquiries. This instability has hindered the Commission's ability to commit to and implement critical key projects aimed at upgrading and strengthening its operations. The signing of a three-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in August of 2023 and a commitment to 3 years funding certainty, provided the stability needed for the Commission to finally advance its long overdue office relocation project.

Working in conjunction with the Queensland Government Accommodation Office (QGAO) the FRC commenced a formal process for approval to relocate to better suited premises. Relocation was approved by the QGAO and after conducting a market scan of the Cairns area QGAO put forward several potential premises to the FRC for review. A property was subsequently inspected and selected by the EMT as suitable to meet the Commission's current and medium term requirements.

The property is a stand-alone building located in close proximity to the Cairns central business district and provides increased floor space, operational desk space and meeting capability including the opportunity to able to meet with clients and Local Commissioners on site, and conduct training.

Over the course of several months the FRC continued to work in conjunction with the QGAO and as per Queensland Government processes as the necessary leases were drawn up and signed. The office relocation project was a key focus during the 2024-25 financial year, involving extensive planning, coordination and preparation to ensure a smooth transition to the new premises. The groundwork and majority of the project milestones were completed during 2024-25 and the registry staff successfully relocated the new premises in the first week following the end of the financial year.