

Family Responsibilities Commission

*Report to the Family Responsibilities Board and
The Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships*

Quarterly Report

No. 47

January 2020 to March 2020



*Report prepared by the Family Responsibilities Commission under the leadership of
Commissioner Tammy Williams*

Executive Summary

Quantified in the table below are the activities undertaken by the Commission during quarter 47 with comparisons shown to the previous quarter.

Table 1: Activity from 1 October 2019 to 31 March 2020.

Activity for the quarter	Qtr 46	Qtr 47
Total number of notices received by the Commission	2,072	1,879
Number of within jurisdiction notices received	1,426	1,221
Number of not within jurisdiction notices received	646	658
Number of clients notified to the Commission from within jurisdiction notices	755	685
Number of clients scheduled to attend conference	467	330
Conferences conducted	741	424
Conference attendance percentage	58.0%	63.9%
Conference non-attendance percentage with acceptable (reasonable) excuse	21.2%	21.6%
Conference outcomes for the quarter		
Family Responsibility Agreements (FRAs) entered into	0	14
Orders made to attend community support services	68	118
Referrals to service providers ¹	78	178
Conditional Income Management (CIM) Orders made	53	32
Clients placed on case plans and CIMs for the quarter²		
Number of clients placed on a case plan and CIM	13	20
Number of clients placed on a case plan without a CIM	52	109
Number of clients placed on a CIM order without a case plan	35	11
Other activity for the quarter		
Applications to Amend or End received	15	18
Voluntary Income Management (VIM) Agreements entered into	2	5
Information as at the last day of the quarter		
Number of clients case managed through a current case plan	133	236
Number of clients subject to a current CIM order	160	162
Number of clients currently on a VIM agreement	10	13

¹ A case plan can have multiple referrals e.g. a client may be referred to both the Wellbeing Centre and MPower under the same case plan.

² During conference the 14 FRAs, 118 orders to attend community support services and 32 CIM orders made, relate to 140 unique clients.

In this quarterly report we have continued our ongoing data reporting review and have amended activity table 1 above to reflect a more client-focussed data reporting table as opposed to the historical process-orientated data. As stated in Quarter 46, the changes to the table are aimed at more accurately documenting the Commission's work and the benefits afforded to FRC clients. It is clear from discussions with our stakeholders that the level of client intervention is of primary interest to readers of our quarterly and annual reports. Further amendments to our data reporting framework are planned to better define the level of client engagement and outcomes, and in the process, a review of our data dictionary will be undertaken.

The Commission's operational agility was tested this quarter with both the 'Aurukun crisis' and the advent of the Coronavirus pandemic. Following the murder in Aurukun on 1 January and subsequent community unrest, many community members feared for their lives and fled to other centres including Coen and Cairns. The Commission worked through complex legal issues and logistics to present a coordinated response to this crisis and identified the need for an elevated FRC presence in both Aurukun and Coen. Conferencing of displaced Aurukun clients was conducted in both Coen and Cairns during the quarter.

Following an internal FRC Operational Review Workshop held on 17 December 2019 which incorporated year-to-date reflections on key processes and the analysis of data across all communities incorporating data on the timeliness of dealing with matters, holding conferences and making decisions, FRC Commissioner Tammy Williams kicked off the new year by leading a Strategic Planning Workshop on 21 January 2020. The event was attended by Registry staff and Local Commissioners Vera Koomeeta from Aurukun, Elaine Liddy from Coen, Doreen Hart from Hope Vale and Loretta Spratt from Mossman Gorge. Unfortunately, the appointed Local Commissioner from Doomadgee was required to cancel their attendance on the morning of travel due to unforeseen circumstances. Specific dashboard data for each community was presented to the Local Commissioners. Honest conversations were held to identify and agree on what successes had been achieved, and conversely what changes were needed to improve efficiencies, how to implement solutions, setting and tracking performance against targets and being accountable for results achieved. Training was conducted covering new Practice Directions and conferencing techniques to improve on early intervention and making quality decisions to support changes in behaviour. Each Local Coordinator then met with their Local Commissioner to establish community action plans for the 2020 year.

Conferencing commenced for Quarter 47 with Aurukun on 28 January. During the quarter sorry business and community unrest affected both Aurukun and Doomadgee, reducing conferencing by 5.5 days of an already short quarter due to the Christmas/New Year school holiday period, during which there is traditionally a conferencing recess. Conferencing in Coen in late March and the last week of conferencing at the end of March for Doomadgee were also cancelled as a direct result of the Coronavirus pandemic (an additional 5 conference days). The reduction in conferences conducted is reflected in Table 1.

Despite the severe disruption to operations, the Local Commissioners put in a supreme effort to support their vulnerable community members, making 178 referrals to service providers compared to 78 for the previous quarter. At the end of the quarter an additional 103 clients from the previous quarter were being case-managed through current case plans. Family Responsibility Agreements increased by 14 and voluntary income management agreements increased by three.

The declared pandemic further challenged operations as indeed it has for the rest of Australia. With three weeks of conferencing left prior to the end of Quarter 47 (effective from 16 March) all travel to FRC communities by FRC support staff was suspended due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Conferencing continued, however, for the next two weeks in Doomadgee, Mossman Gorge and Hope Vale with the Local Commissioners volunteering to perform additional functions over and above their sessional sitting duties, ably supported remotely by the FRC Commissioner and Registry. Aurukun conferencing continued with the

support of the Commission's Aurukun Local Coordinator, locked down in community with the entire Aurukun population. Conferences scheduled in Coen in late March and the last week of conferencing at the end of March for Doomadgee were cancelled as a direct result of the Coronavirus pandemic. In both cases the Local Commissioners and communities were coming to grips with being 'locked down' and felt it was an inappropriate time to ask community members to attend conference.

The Commission is pleased to report that the 2018-19 Annual Report was tabled by the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships to Parliament on 20 March 2020.

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Abbreviations

CIM	Conditional Income Management
DATSIP	Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships
DoE	Department of Education
DJAG	Department of Justice and Attorney-General
DV	Domestic Violence
DVB	Domestic Violence Breach
DVO	Domestic Violence Order
FRA	Family Responsibilities Agreement
FRC	Family Responsibilities Commission
QPS	Queensland Police Service
VIM	Voluntary Income Management

Also:

Family Responsibilities Commission (the Commission)
Family Responsibilities Commission Act 2008 (the Act)

Family Responsibilities Commission Welfare Reforms

Report to 31 March 2020.

1. Activities and Trends

Notices

In quarter 47 the Commission received 1,879 agency notices³. Some individuals may have been the subject of more than one agency notice. Of that figure 1,221 notices (65 percent) relating to 685 clients were within the Commission's jurisdiction, and 658 notices (35 percent) were outside the Commission's jurisdiction.

Total within and not within jurisdiction notices received decreased by 193 from the previous quarter. Of those notices within jurisdiction Magistrates Court, Domestic Violence Breach, Domestic Violence Orders, School Attendance and Housing Tenancy notices decreased from quarter 46.

Table 2: In jurisdiction notices by type and community 1 January 2020 to 31 March 2020.

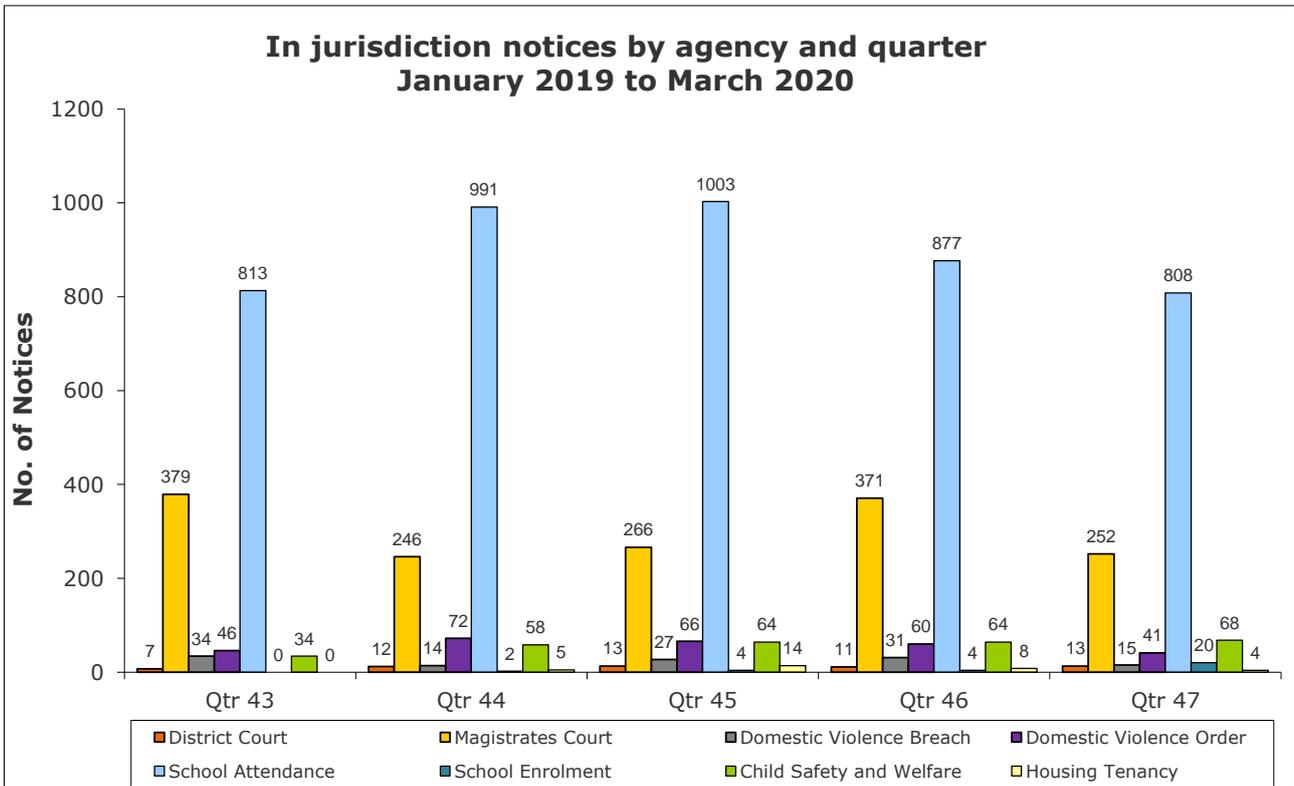
Type of Notice	AU	CO	DM ⁴	HV	MG	Total
Supreme Court notices	0	0	-	0	0	0
District Court notices	13	0	-	0	0	13
Magistrates Court notices	117	13	-	65	57	252
Domestic Violence Breach notices	2	5	-	7	1	15
Domestic Violence Order notices	19	3	-	11	8	41
School Attendance notices	270	12	432	80	14	808
School Enrolment notice	17	0	0	3	0	20
Child Safety and Welfare notices	19	3	35	6	5	68
Housing Tenancy notices	3	1	-	0	0	4
Total	460	37	467	172	85	1221

Further details of notices within jurisdiction for each community are set out below:

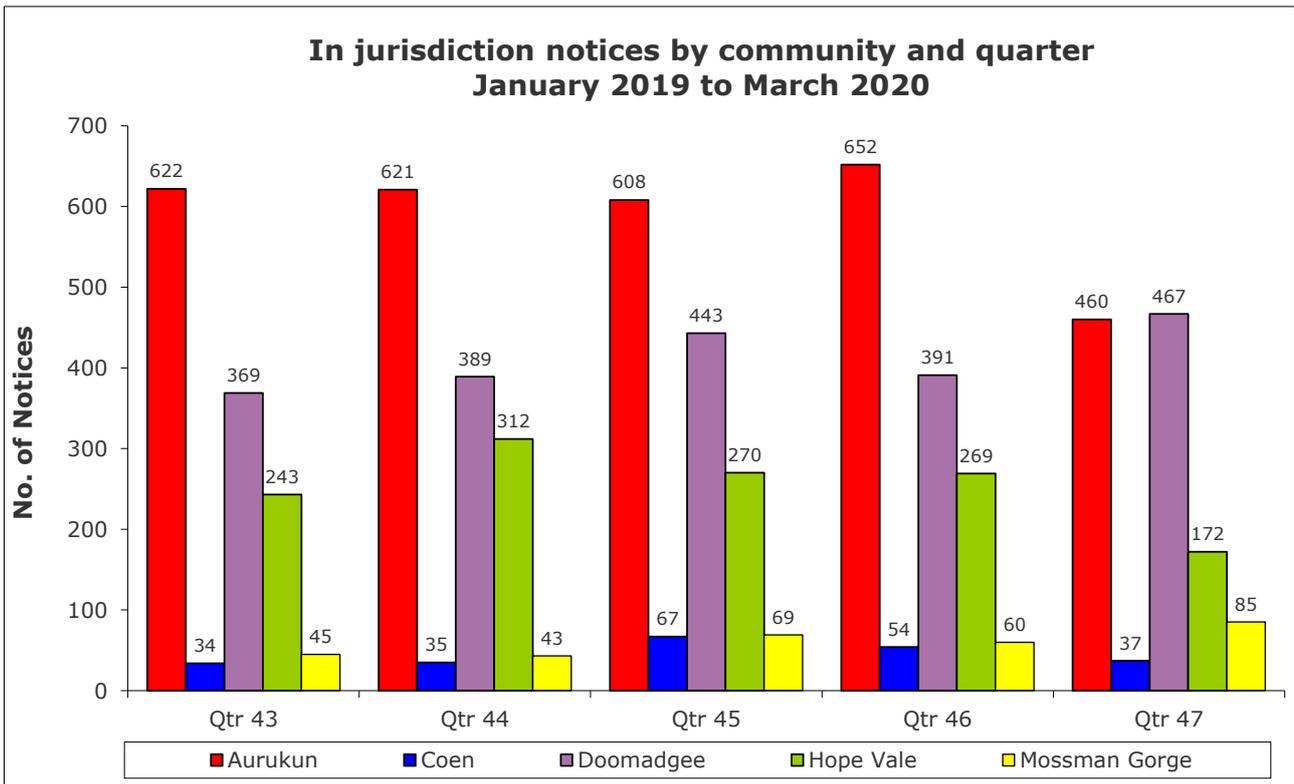
- Aurukun received **460** notices relating to 268 clients (156 female and 112 male)
- Coen received **37** notices relating to 23 clients (9 female and 14 male)
- Doomadgee received **467** notices relating to 255 clients (186 female and 69 male)
- Hope Vale received **172** notices, relating to 100 clients (56 female and 44 male)
- Mossman Gorge received **85** notices relating to 39 clients (21 female and 18 male).

³ Counting rules are that an agency notice is counted on the basis of number of 'clients' on the notice. For example a child safety and welfare notice relating to two parents is counted as two notices.

⁴ Agency notices for the community of Doomadgee are presently received from the Department of Education and the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women only.

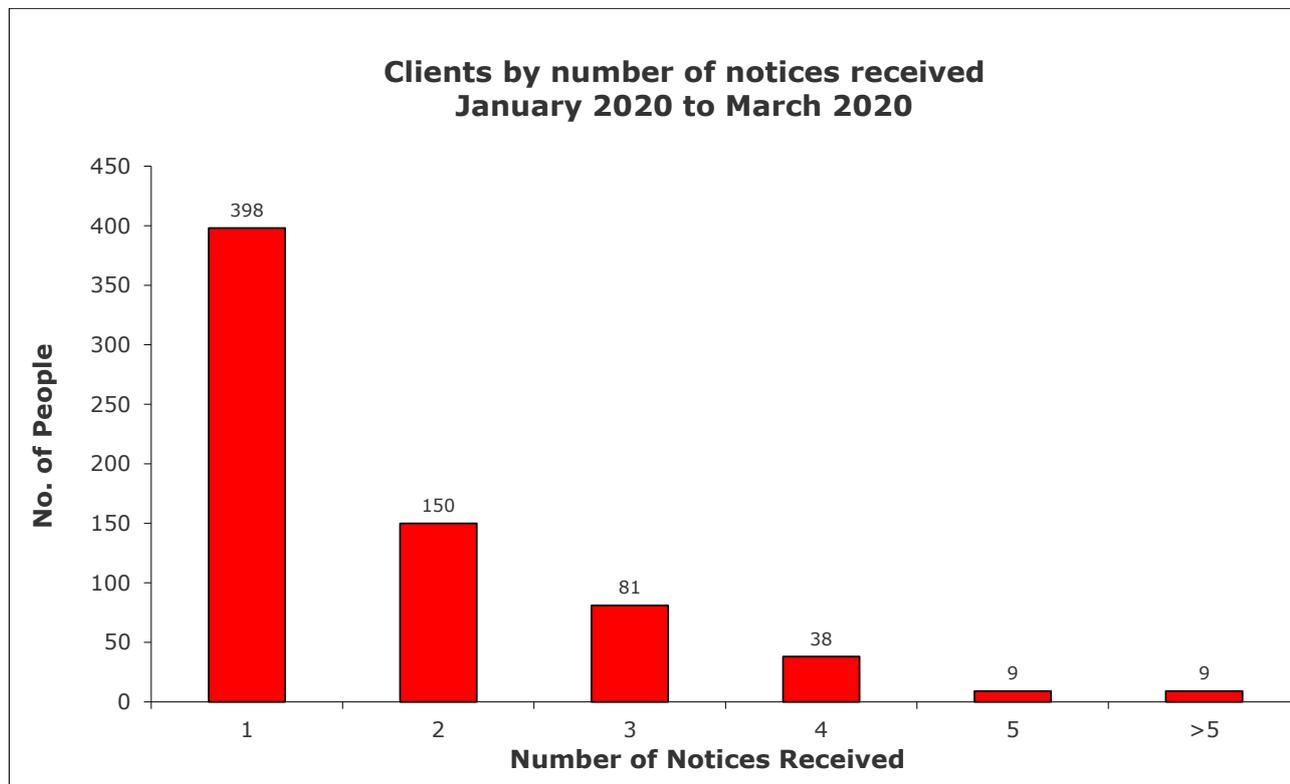


Graph 1: In jurisdiction notices by agency processed and quarter 1 January 2019 to 31 March 2020.



Graph 2: In jurisdiction notices by community and quarter 1 January 2019 to 31 March 2020.

For quarter 47, 41.9 percent of clients have received more than one notice with 1.3 percent of clients receiving more than five notices. Frequently this illustrates multiple child school absences for the one family, or multiple Magistrates Court notices relating to one incident. Conversely, 58.1 percent of clients have received only one notice. Forty-eight new clients were added to the Commission’s database during the quarter.



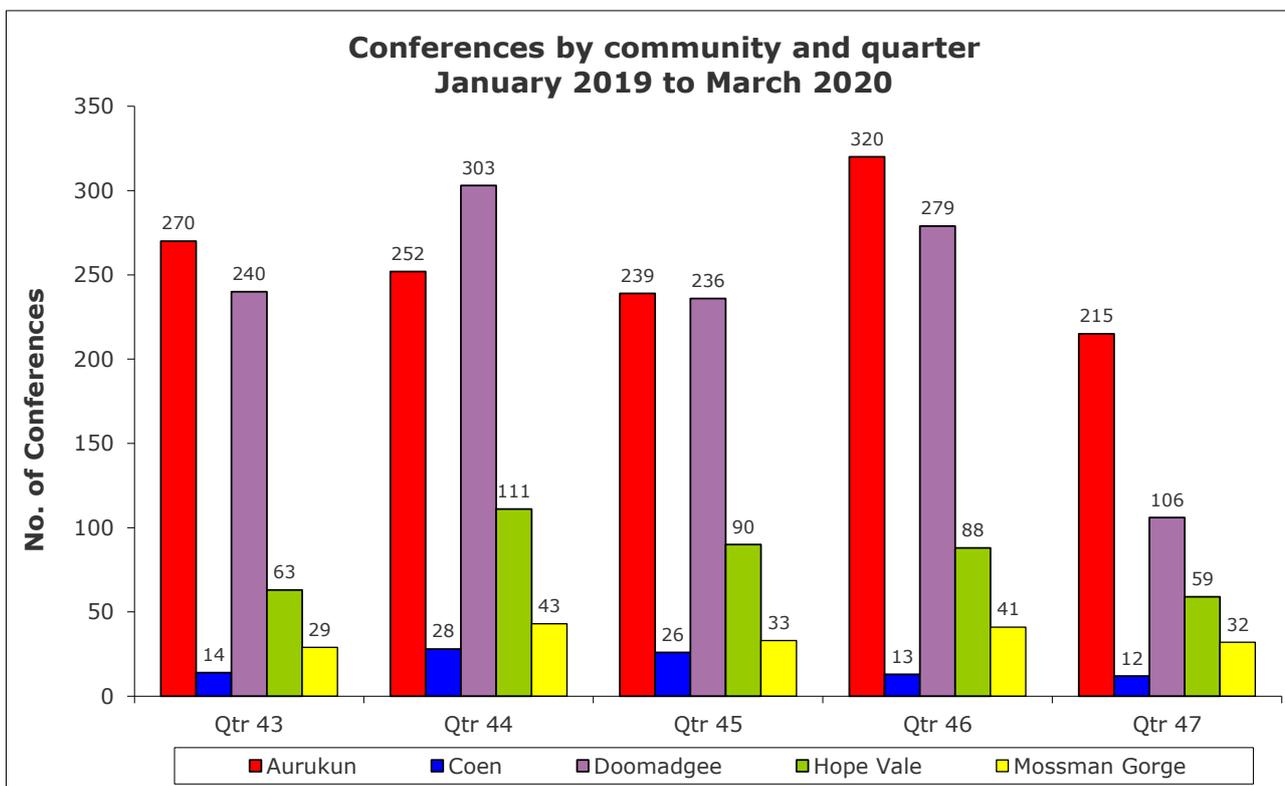
Graph 3: FRC clients by number of notices 1 January 2020 to 31 March 2020.

(Note: Counting rules stipulate that where multiple charges are received each charge is counted as an individual notice or each child’s absence is counted as one notice – i.e. if three children from the one family were absent, that was counted as three notices).

Conferences

A total of 424 conferences⁵, relating to 330 clients pertaining to all matters were held across the five communities in quarter 47, resulting in 14 FRA’s being entered into, 118 orders made to attend community support services and 32 CIM orders issued. When compared to last quarter there was an increase of 14 FRA’s and 50 orders to attend community support services and a decrease of 21 CIM orders. Other outcomes as a result of conferencing during the quarter were decisions for no further action, rescheduling and scheduling to return for review with compliance. Conferences decreased from 741 in quarter 46 to 424 in quarter 47, in part due to the cancellation of some conferences in response to the covid-19 outbreak. The attendance at conference increased from 58.0% in quarter 46 to 63.9% in quarter 47.

⁵ The number of conferences held relates to the number of conferences listed, which includes where a client was served with a Notice to Attend Conference and subsequently failed to attend.



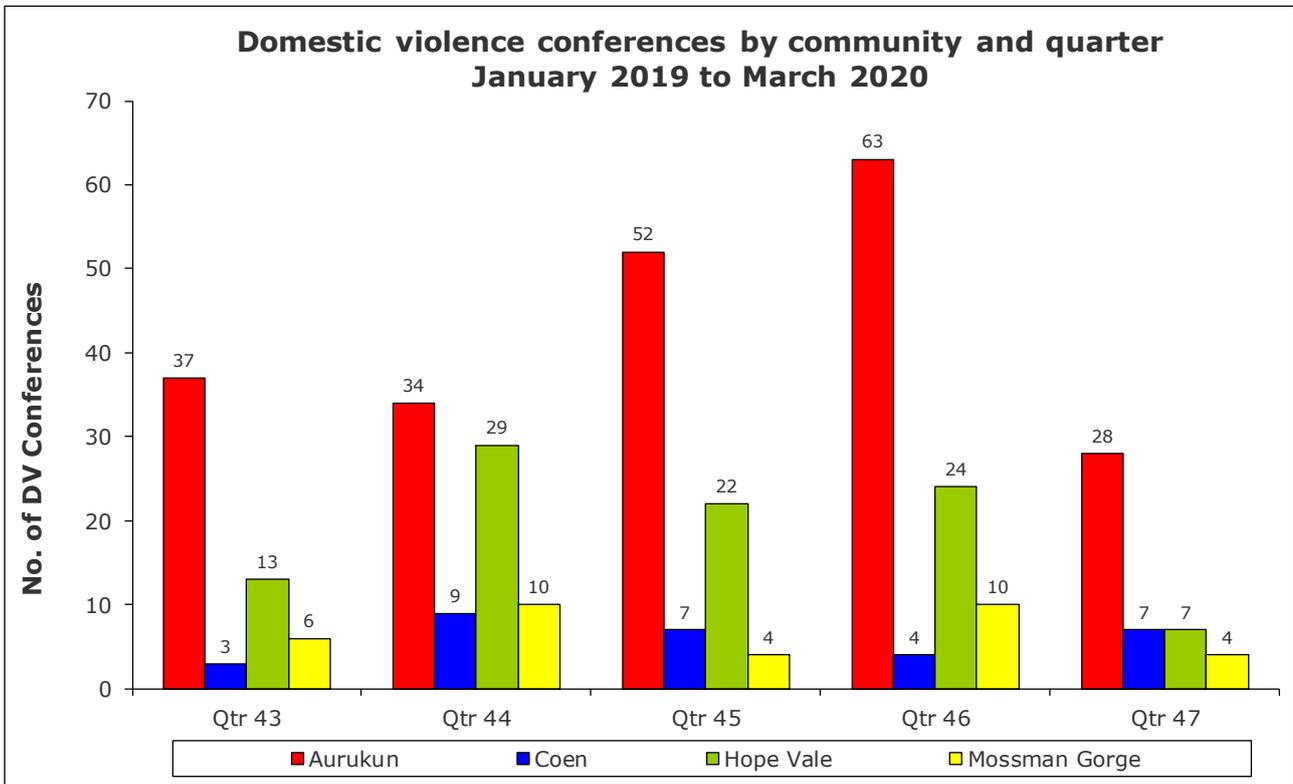
Graph 4: Conferences by community and quarter 1 January 2019 to 31 March 2020.

Conferences for Domestic Violence related matters

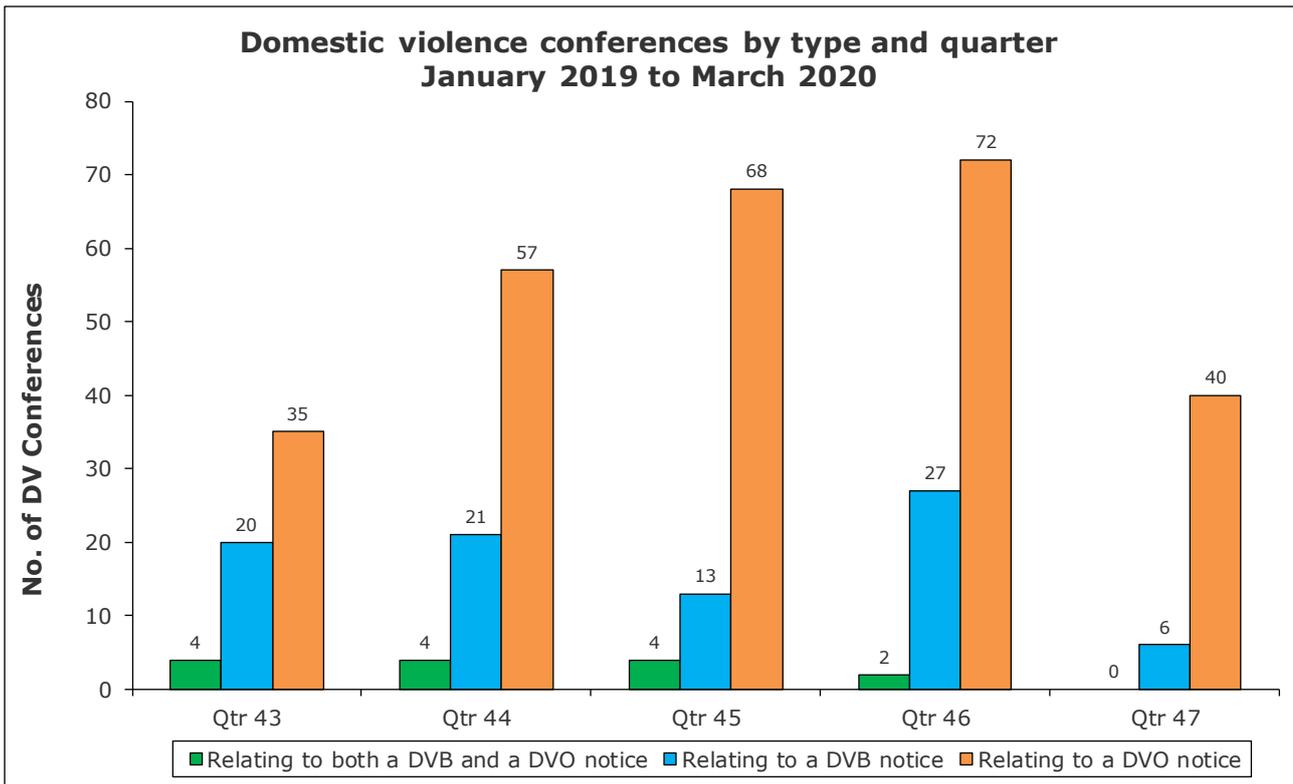
As a subset of the total number of conferences conducted for the quarter, 46 domestic violence conferences were conducted in Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge in quarter 47, a decrease of 55 domestic violence conferences from the previous quarter. The Commission received 16 fewer domestic violence breaches and 19 fewer domestic violence orders within jurisdiction for quarter 47 when compared to quarter 46. Domestic violence conferences in the communities during the quarter were as follows: Aurukun decreased by 35, Coen increased by 3, Hope Vale decreased by 17 and Mossman Gorge decreased by 6.

Table 3: Number of conferences held in relation to domestic violence notices (breaches and orders) per community 1 January 2020 to 31 March 2020.

Number of Domestic Violence Conferences	AU	CO	HV	MG	Total
Relating to both a DVB and a DVO notice	0	0	0	0	0
Relating to a DVB notice	4	2	0	0	6
Relating to a DVO notice	24	5	7	4	40
Total	28	7	7	4	46



Graph 5: Domestic violence conferences by community and quarter 1 January 2019 to 31 March 2020.

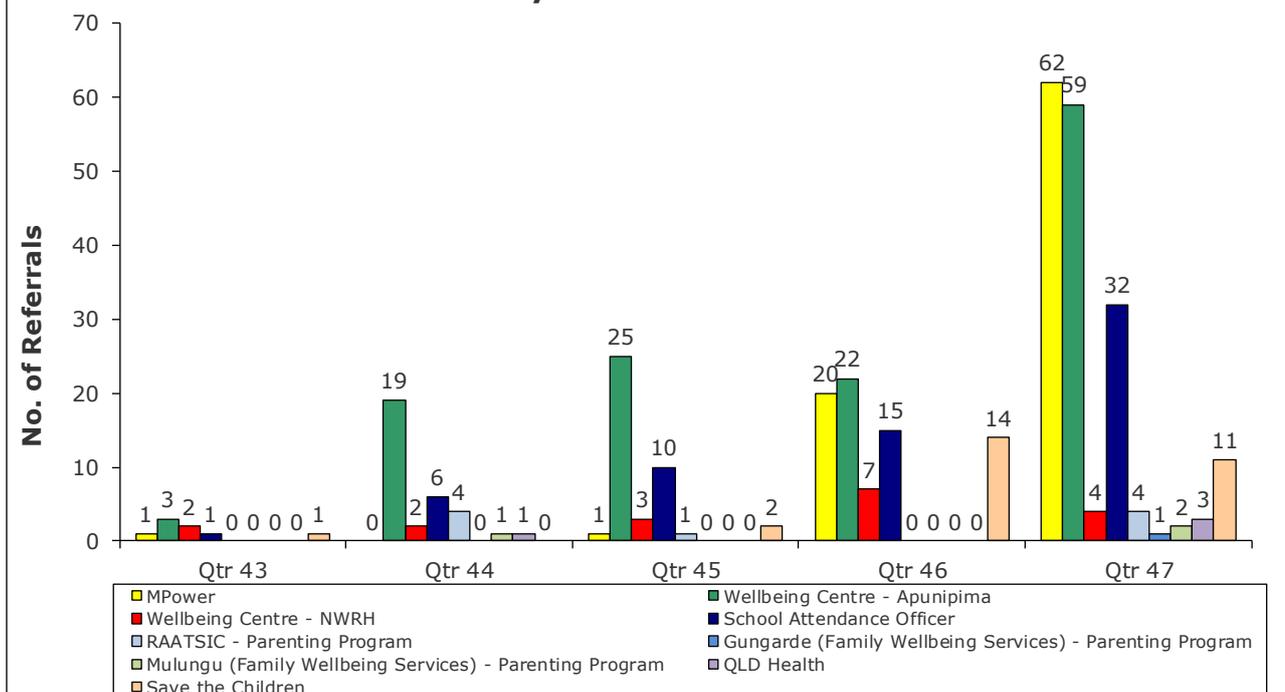


Graph 6: Domestic violence conferences by type and quarter 1 January 2019 to 31 March 2020.

Referrals

The total number of referrals to service providers increased from 78 in quarter 46 to 178 in quarter 47, relating to 129 clients. Since 2008 the Commission has referred 1,125 clients (569 female and 556 male) to service providers for assistance. Referrals in the communities during the quarter were as follows: Aurukun increased by 59; Coen increased by 10; Doomadgee decreased by 1; Hope Vale increased by 14 and Mossman Gorge increased by 18.

FRC referrals by referral type and quarter January 2019 to March 2020



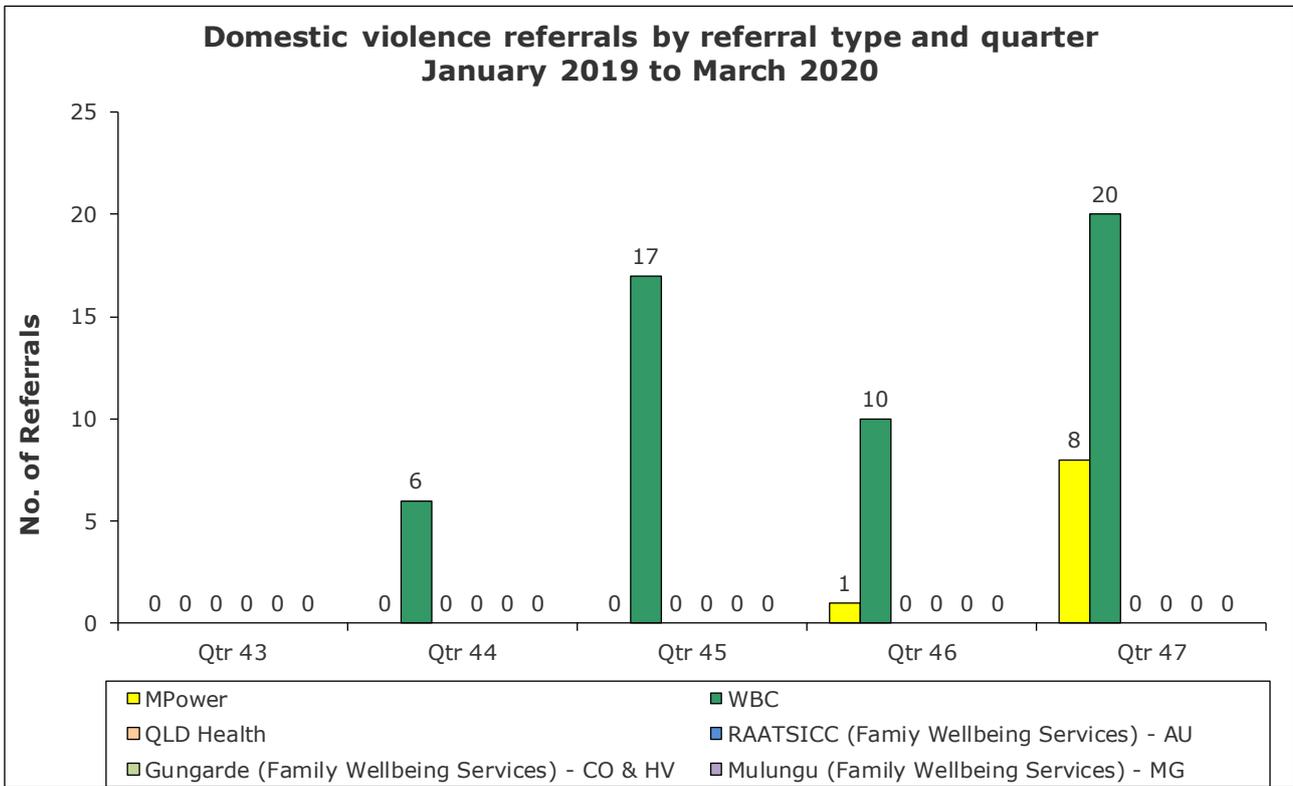
Graph 7: Referrals by referral type and quarter 1 January 2019 to 31 March 2020.

Referrals for Domestic Violence related matters

As a subset of the total number of referrals in the quarter, 28 referrals were made in relation to domestic violence conferences in quarter 47, representing an increase of 17 from the previous quarter.

Table 4: Number of referrals in relation to domestic violence notices (breaches and orders) per community 1 January 2020 to 31 March 2020.

Notice Type	Community	Referral	Provider Total
DVB	Aurukun	MPower	1
	Aurukun	Wellbeing Centre	3
	DVB Total		4
DVO	Aurukun	MPower	4
	Aurukun	Wellbeing Centre	11
	Coen	MPower	2
	Coen	Wellbeing Centre	2
	Hope Vale	Wellbeing Centre	3
	Mossman Gorge	MPower	1
	Mossman Gorge	Wellbeing Centre	1
	DVO Total		24
GRAND TOTAL		28	

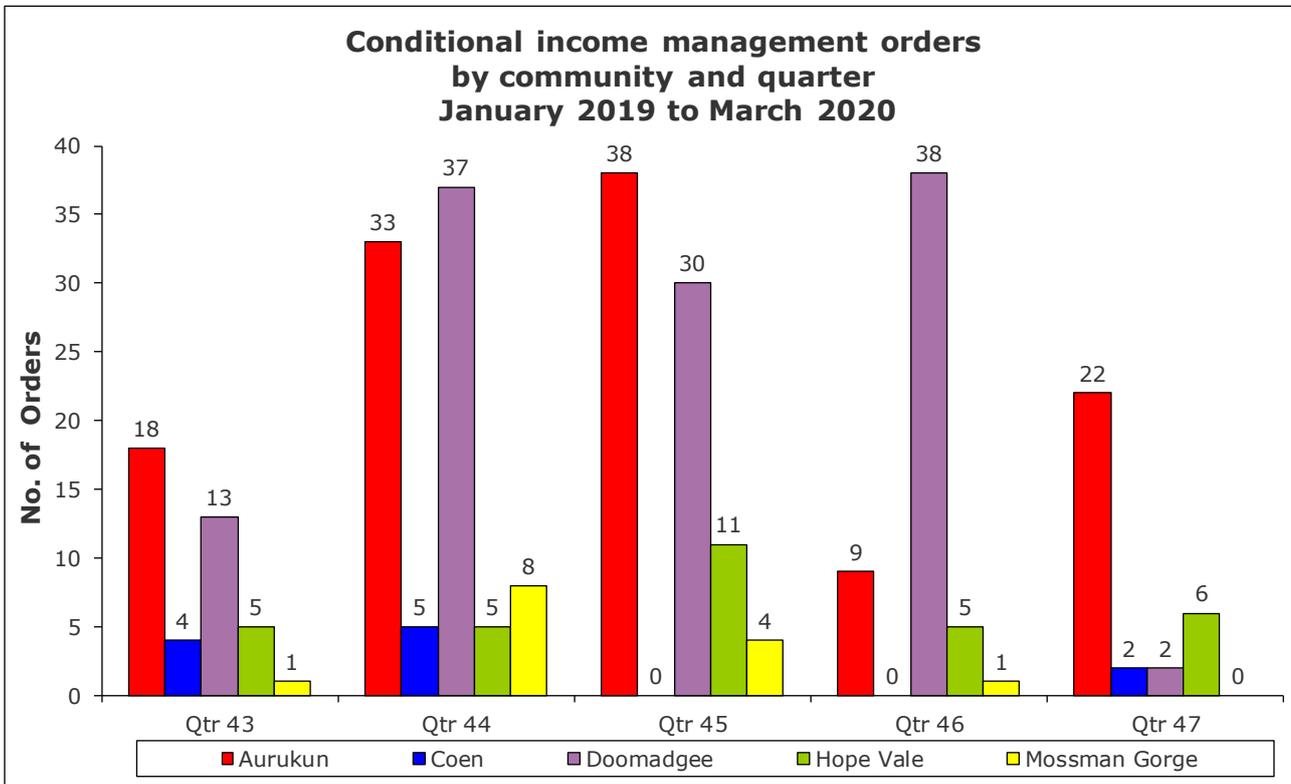


Graph 8: Domestic violence referrals by referral type and quarter 1 January 2019 to 31 March 2020.

Conditional Income Management

A total of 32 CIM orders relating to 31 clients were made in quarter 47, a decrease of 21 from quarter 46. Since the commencement of the Commission 2,756 CIM orders inclusive of original orders, extensions and amendments have been made relating to 940 clients (539 female and 401 male). Decreases were seen in Doomadgee and Mossman Gorge of 36 and 1 CIM orders respectively, whilst Aurukun, Coen and Hope Vale increased by 13, 2 and 1 CIM orders respectively for the quarter.

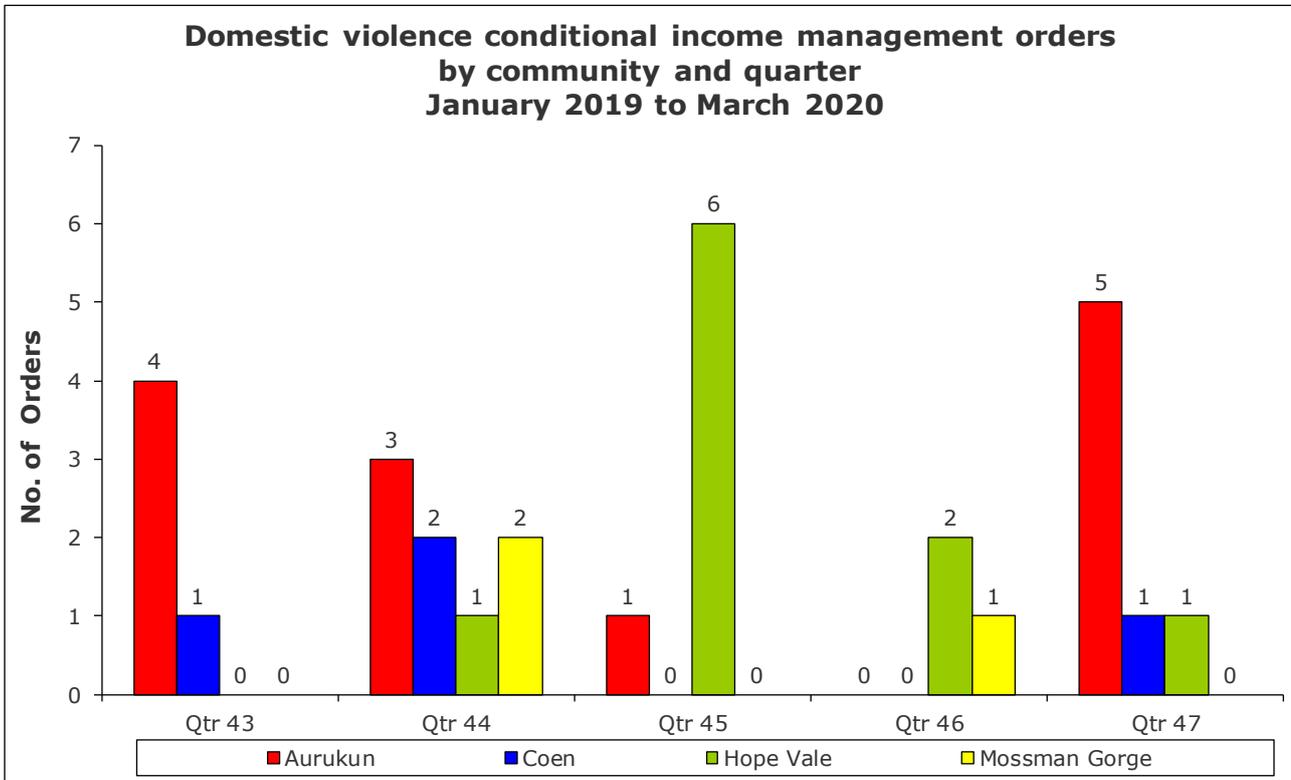
As at 31 March 2020 there were 162 clients subject to a current CIM order. Commissioners continue to negotiate with clients to achieve desirable outcomes, or to demonstrate motivation and commitment to make appropriate life choices. Demonstrated positive steps toward taking responsibility provide the Commissioners with sufficient reason to consider revoking a CIM when requested by the client.



Graph 9: Conditional income management orders by community and quarter 1 January 2019 to 31 March 2020.

Conditional Income Management for Domestic Violence related matters

As a subset of the total number of CIMs in the quarter, 7 CIM orders inclusive of alterations were made in relation to domestic violence conferences in quarter 47, representing an increase of 4 from the previous quarter.



Graph 10: Domestic violence conditional income management orders by community and quarter 1 January 2019 to 31 March 2020.

Voluntary Income Management

The Commission processed 5 VIM agreements this quarter and since the commencement of the Commission in 2008, 147 clients (92 female and 55 male) have had an active VIM agreement. The age demographic for this cohort is somewhat older than those reported in table 6 with an average female age of 40⁶ and an average male age of 45⁶. As at 31 March 2020 there were 13 clients on a current VIM agreement. Those clients that request a VIM agreement use income management as a savings and budget tool, often for a specified period and to deter family members from accessing their income.

Clients placed on case plans and CIMs for the quarter

The 14 FRAs, 118 orders to attend community support services and the 32 CIM orders issued related to 140 clients. Please note a client may be placed on a case plan at the beginning of the quarter to one service provider and then referred to another service provider later in the same quarter. Similarly, a client may be placed on a CIM order at 60%, 75% or 90% and then have their percentage of income management reduced or increased later in the quarter. A client may also be separately placed on a case plan and income management throughout the quarter.

Of the 140 clients (89 female and 51 male):

- 20 clients (13 female and 7 male) were placed on a case plan and a CIM order during the quarter;
- 109 clients (67 female and 42 male) were placed on a case plan without a CIM; and
- 11 clients (9 female and 2 male) were placed on a CIM order without a case plan.

Case Management

As at 31 March 2020, 236 clients were being case-managed through a current case plan, an increase from 133 in quarter 46. Increases were seen in Aurukun, Doomadgee, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge of 62, 20, 10 and 12 respectively whilst Coen decreased by 1.

Applications to Amend or End Agreements or Orders

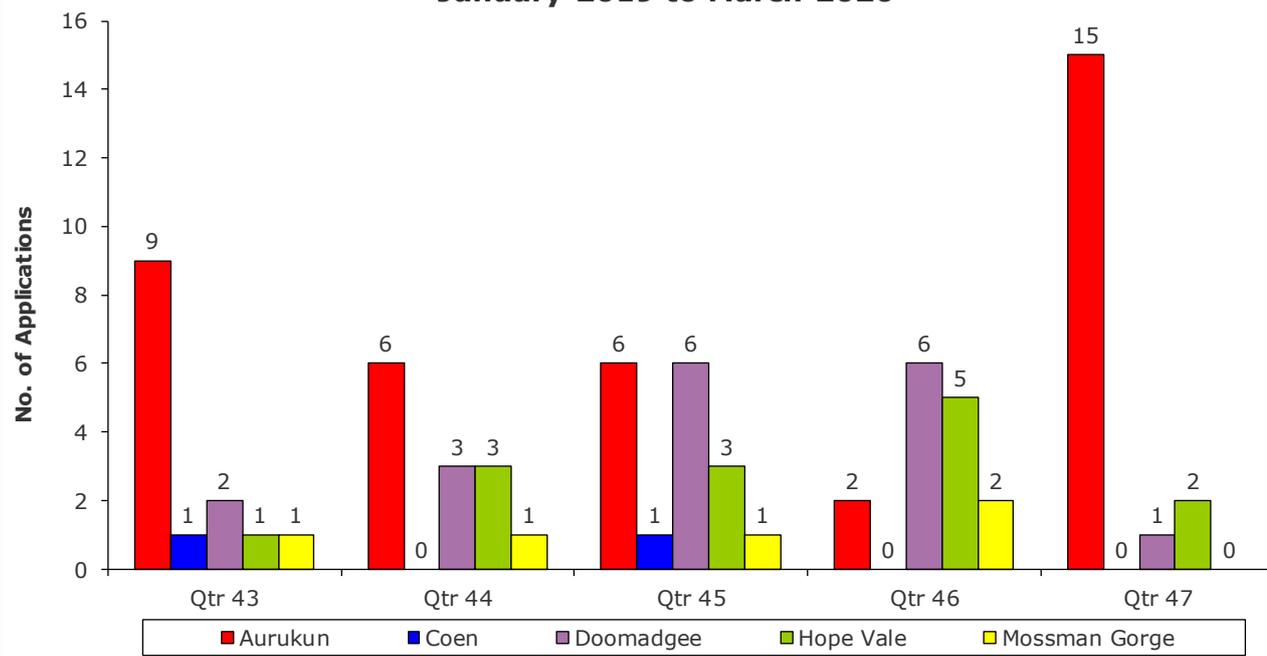
Eighteen applications (16 female and 2 male) to Amend or End an Agreement or Order were received in quarter 47, an increase of 3 from quarter 46. Please note a client may apply to amend or end their agreement or order on multiple occasions throughout a quarter. Outcomes of the 18 applications received are as follows:

- 6 Applications granted and income management agreements and orders revoked
 - 1 CIM order at 90 percent revoked and client placed on a new order at 75 percent for 12 months
 - 1 CIM order at 75 percent revoked and client placed on a new order at 60 percent for 12 months
 - 1 CIM order at 75 percent revoked and client placed on a new order at 90 percent for 12 months
- 4 Applications refused, with one client also given a reprimand
- 1 Application rescheduled, decision pending.
- 4 Applications received at the end of the quarter, decisions pending.

The Commission continues to encourage clients to participate in the Amend or End process. Commissioners report increasing client confidence to question decisions and the reasons behind decisions, both for decisions delivered by the Commission and decisions delivered by external agencies and bodies.

⁶ Average age of a VIM client since the commencement of the Commission is calculated from the start date when a client was first placed on a VIM agreement.

Number of applications to amend or end agreements or orders by community and quarter January 2019 to March 2020



Graph 11: Applications to amend or end agreements or orders by community and quarter 1 January 2019 to 31 March 2020.

FRC client population by gender and age

Table 5: FRC client population by gender and age 1 January 2020 to 31 March 2020.

Information for the quarter	Female Count	Male Count	Female Average age	Male Average age
Clients who received a notice during the quarter ⁷	428	257	37	38
Clients who conferenced during the quarter ⁸	210	120	36	38
Clients referred during the quarter ⁹	80	49	38	35
Clients placed on CIM during the quarter ¹⁰	22	9	36	32

⁷ Average age of a client who received a notice for the quarter is calculated at the date of the first notice received for the client during the quarter.

⁸ Average age of a conferenced client for the quarter is calculated at the date of the first conference held for the client during the quarter.

⁹ Average age of a referred client for the quarter is calculated at the first conference date held where the client was placed on a case plan during the quarter.

¹⁰ Average age of a CIM'd client for the quarter is calculated at the first conference date held where the client was placed on a CIM during the quarter.

Estimated resident populations:

Aurukun: The community of Aurukun had an estimated resident adult population of 929 people as at 30 June 2018^{11,12}.

Coen: The township of Coen had an estimated resident adult population of 257 people as at 30 June 2018^{11,13}.

Doomadgee: The community of Doomadgee had an estimated resident adult population of 827 people as at 30 June 2018^{11,12}.

Hope Vale: The estimated resident adult population of Hope Vale was 708 people as at 30 June 2018^{11,12}.

Mossman Gorge: The Mossman Gorge community had an estimated resident population of 87 people as at 30 June 2018^{11,14}.

¹¹ Note: Australian Statistical Geography Standard 2016 boundaries used are local government areas for Aurukun, Doomadgee and Hope Vale, and statistical areas level 1 (SA1s) of 3139616 for Coen and 3116408 for Mossman Gorge.

¹² Note: Adults 18 years and over provided by the Queensland Government Statistician's Office (QGSO), Queensland Treasury, based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) unpublished preliminary Estimated Resident Population (ERP) data by age and sex at the Local Government Area level for 30 June 2018.

¹³ Note: Adults 18 years and over provided by QGSO, Queensland Treasury, based on the ABS unpublished preliminary ERP data by age and sex at the Statistical Area level 1 for 30 June 2018.

¹⁴ Note: Total population provided by QGSO, Queensland Treasury, not 18 years and older, due to the small size of the total population from the ABS unpublished preliminary ERP data at the Statistical Area level 1 for 30 June 2018.

2. Future Direction and Challenges

Quarter 47 has been largely influenced by two events, the first being what the FRC has come to term the 'Aurukun crisis', and the second being the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). Both have challenged the Commission and taught lessons for business continuity from a community and corporate perspective.

Aurukun crisis response project

Following the fatal stabbing of a 37-year-old man in Aurukun on 1 January 2020 community rioting occurred with residents taking to the streets seeking retribution for the killing. Many community members, fearing for their lives, fled Aurukun to other centers including Coen and Cairns.

An urgent Executive Management Team (EMT) meeting was convened to discuss an FRC response to the problems caused by the influx of Aurukun community members into Coen and Cairns, and to appropriately provide support for many traumatised residents still resident in Aurukun. The EMT allocated personnel and resources to implement a coordinated action plan to ensure the Commission was able to continue to be responsive to the needs of clients. A temporary fulltime 'special lead' was appointed from the Cairns Registry as a Senior Community Coordinator to coordinate the heightened response, and to work in conjunction with both the Coen and Aurukun Local Coordinators. The Commission's presence in Coen was also increased and a temporary fulltime Local Coordinator was appointed to Coen during the crisis period. Additional conferences were scheduled for Aurukun clients in Coen and Cairns to support them in the areas of school enrolment and school attendance for the displaced children and to enable referrals to support services - particularly in relation to counselling for trauma, income management and budgeting and ATODS.

The FRC Senior Community Coordinator worked closely with partners in Australian and State Governments and community sectors to identify and locate Aurukun clients who had relocated to other areas and to determine their status. A register of displaced Aurukun FRC clients was compiled to determine those clients who were eligible to be conferenced. Information recorded included the person's location, partner, children for whom Centrelink payments were being claimed and particulars of current case plans or income management orders.

On 11 February 2020 an FRC conference sitting in Coen was conducted by Commissioner Williams and two Cairns based Aurukun Commissioners teleconferencing with Coen, where the Coen Local Coordinator and a Coen Local Commissioner were present. During conference clients were reminded of community expectations regarding behaviour in the communities to which they had relocated and their obligations in relation to school attendance. Referrals were made to the CYP O-Hub for budgeting and savings advice and to the Wellbeing Centre for anger management, DVO counselling and for linking clients with the local Men's Group for support and on country activities. Before and during conferencing, Commissioner Williams assisted the Aurukun Commissioners in the consideration of complex legal issues of jurisdiction and interpretation of the *Family Responsibilities Commission Act 2008* (the Act) particularly in relation to sections 7 (a) and (b), 48, 49 and 50. Aurukun Local Commissioners demonstrated great strength and resilience, setting aside family and community conflicts to work as a united team in conference.

On 27 February 2020 a second conference was conducted with Commissioner Williams and two Aurukun Commissioners again teleconferencing with Coen. Further referrals were made to the Wellbeing Centre and O-Hub and one existing income management order was subject to a percentage increase. A further conference arranged for Wednesday 25 March 2020 for Aurukun clients in Coen was cancelled following travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 outbreak. On Wednesday 26 February two Aurukun Commissioners (resident at that time in Cairns) and the Senior Community Coordinator

set up an information and support session in the boardroom of the premises of the Young Australia League (YAL) in Martyn St, Cairns, where a number of displaced Aurukun residents were in crisis accommodation. Throughout the morning clients approached the Commissioners to discuss issues such as whether or not to return to Aurukun, housing, enrolment in Cairns schools, applying to end income management, and general information about support, service providers and other resources available in Cairns. The Student Education Trust Coordinator from Cape York Partnerships also attended the session to support clients with information about accessing their Student Education Trusts whilst in Cairns.

On Thursday 5 March 2020 two Aurukun Commissioners, with Commissioner Williams via teleconference, conducted conference for Aurukun clients in Cairns at YAL. The conference was well received and well attended. The Aurukun O-Hub team who had temporarily withdrawn from Aurukun attended YAL Cairns and clients with case plan referrals to MPower were engaged immediately in a 'warm handover'. On Monday 16 March the Aurukun response project was brought to a premature end when, following briefings and updates from the Australian and Queensland Government representatives, the FRC Executive Management Team met to discuss the events emerging from the COVID-19 outbreak and made the decision to suspend all non-essential travel. Due to the Queensland Government facilitating the repatriation of Aurukun community members residing in Cairns back to Aurukun, and the gradual decrease in the number of Aurukun people residing in Coen, conferences planned for Coen and Cairns were subsequently cancelled.

One of the notable outcomes from the displacement of Aurukun FRC clients has been the number of applications to end income management orders received. A primary reason given for the requests was the inability to use the BasicsCard on public transport. Applications were processed under normal circumstances with Amend End conferences heard in person or over the phone when it was the only option available. Commissioners considered each application on a case by case basis requesting school enrolment and attendance information be provided before a decision was made.

The exodus of FRC clients also impacted Commission operations in Aurukun making it difficult to locate clients for the serving of notices to attend conference, and conference was reduced from three days to two days in one instance. Allowances were made to use technology to conduct conferences over the phone as permitted under s56 of the Act. Cairns Registry staff were required to seek additional school enrolment and attendance information from the Office of the Director-General of the Department of Education – a requirement which necessitated the implementation of a new process and new forms.

Whilst the primary aim of the crisis response project was to ensure continued engagement with and support for FRC clients, an unexpected positive side effect has been, for some clients, a change in the perception of the FRC from a punitive measure to an agency for support. A further indirect benefit has been the strengthening of already positive relationships between the Commission and partners such as Police, Cape York Partnerships, the O-Hub and Apunipima. The FRC's response to the Aurukun crisis was efficient and targeted. It demonstrated the Commission's commitment to maintaining relevance to community members in emergency situations. The Commissioners' approach was supportive rather than authoritarian. People appeared to be keen to engage with the Commissioners, and respect for their leadership was apparent in the relatively high rates of attendance at conference in Coen and Cairns. Conducting conference outside of Aurukun demonstrated the Commission's commitment to providing support for clients in challenging circumstances, a situation which inadvertently served as a forerunner for continuing to function during the subsequent crisis brought about by the outbreak of the Coronavirus.

COVID-19 impact and response

The first case of COVID-19 was confirmed to have reached Australia in January 2020 and on March 11, 2020 COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation. An EMT meeting was held on 13 March 2020 at which the Executive adopted the FRC's Preparedness Framework for COVID-19. The Preparedness Framework set out four stages, preparation, scenario 1, scenario 2 and scenario 3 with scenario 3 being when clinical severity is considered high level and critical activities are compromised. An alert framework was also adopted to alert staff when a transition from preparedness to each subsequent phase manifests itself.

In balancing the Commission's business continuity with community vulnerabilities on Sunday, 15 March 2020, the EMT along with the FRC Trained Safety Advisor met following briefings and updates over the weekend from the Prime Minister, Premier of Queensland and Federal Government representatives. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss emerging events and how best to protect Registry staff, Local Commissioners and clients from the risk of infection with COVID-19. Based on the most recent information available, the EMT decided unanimously to suspend all non-essential travel to the FRC communities. Whilst the decision was made taking into account social distancing requirements and other Government issued health directives, it was not made lightly. Several factors were taken into consideration such as the vulnerability of children whose parents are on trigger notices, balanced against the need to ensure the ongoing safety of our staff, Local Commissioners and community members. The limited remote community access to acute health care in critical situations was of major concern. This proactive step was taken to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 into areas where a vulnerable cohort of people live, and in response to feedback from some Local Commissioners and community stakeholders who expressed their grave concerns for community safety and that they wished their communities, *"locked down sooner rather than later"*.

Throughout the pandemic period, the Commission will be required to deal with current FRC clients who are already on orders and case plans and the Commission must also be in a position to conference on further notices received from notifying agencies. We are particularly concerned that we are in a position to meet our obligations to the children and vulnerable people of Aurukun, Coen, Doomadgee, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge. This concern is heightened with the increase of welfare payments within community and the potential increase in domestic and family violence, ongoing concerns of child safety and the general additional pressures being placed on families who have restricted movement between households in the communities.

In ceasing travel to the communities, the EMT determined that in this time of uncertainty, it was particularly important that conferencing continue whilst the communities are COVID-19 free, but with the following restrictions – conferencing being undertaken by utilising existing local FRC resources in community, supported by the use of remote technology linking Local Commissioners who are sitting in conference with members of the Cairns based Registry team and the FRC Commissioner. In the current special circumstances which exist we are asking our Local Commissioners to play a greater operational role on behalf of the FRC to support the community whilst we are unable to travel and conduct normal operations. Their strict sessional conferencing duties have been voluntarily extended to manually recording conference outcomes on occasion, the delivery of decisions after conference and the support of clients outside the conferencing environment (including liaising with support services). This arrangement has provided an opportunity to build the capabilities of the Local Commissioners, whilst also providing remuneration during this difficult time. Throughout this period, the Registry team will continue to work closely with Local Commissioners to support them in this new working environment. The holding of conferences with remote support has already been tested quite successfully during the Aurukun crisis response and in Doomadgee.

Due to the risk to future scheduling of conferences should the current COVID-19 situation worsen, the Commission has been identifying priority clients who will need to be conferenced as soon as possible. The priority has been based on child safety and domestic family violence risks which may be exacerbated in the current social situation. Priority is also being given to amend/end applications and voluntary income management clients whose orders are due to expire in the next 3 months.

In considering our need to meet the mandate of the FRC Act, we are nevertheless conscious of the social distancing requirements now legislated by the Australian Government in its effort to reduce the infection of COVID-19 in our communities. Bearing in mind that the FRC Act is prescriptive in regard to the number of Commissioners required to make decisions, we have identified the need to reduce as much as we are able, the number of people physically attending in conference situations. Attendance at conference for FRC clients will be encouraged by teleconference as much as possible. This will safeguard not only the health of our Local Commissioners, many of whom fall within the high-risk age group for COVID-19, but also the community members required at conference.

Further, we have identified that there are likely to be occasions where community members may approach the Commission on a voluntary basis, either for voluntary income management or voluntary referrals. The Commission will be working with the Local Commissioners to recognise susceptible community members who are willing to self-identify and seek engagement with the FRC to provide a mechanism outside the formal conferencing environment to provide assistance – either a voluntary BasicsCard or voluntary referral. The Commission has been working with the Australian Government in an effort to streamline the issuing of BasicsCards without the assistance of Centrelink staff on the ground. The structural protection of income management would be a valuable support for community members receiving stimulus payments.

Local Commissioners have responded well to undertaking extra duties to ensure that conferencing continues. Despite that, two conference sittings were cancelled due to the Coronavirus pandemic – Coen conference of 24 March, and Doomadgee conferences 31 March to 2 April. In both cases the Local Commissioners and community were coming to grips with their communities being 'locked down' and felt it was not the appropriate time to ask community members to attend a conference.

A key strategy to assist in managing the COVID-19 operational challenge has been the temporary appointment of a Community Coordinator (COVID Response) position. The role of this position is primarily to: manage, coordinate and monitor conferencing capability in the FRC communities, initiate and maintain client case management links with service providers on the ground in the communities; coordinate the support of Local Commissioners during conferencing; coordinate the support of Local Commissioners and clients in a COVID-19 response where conferencing is not able to occur; and provide advice to the EMT on strategic implementation options and risks. The incumbent staff member began in the role on 14 April 2020 and the full-time position will continue for the duration of the COVID-19 response period.

Regular reminders for staff and Local Commissioners on the importance of hygiene and self-isolation, and updates on the COVID-19 status and government response have been provided since the commencement of the pandemic. Financial support has been provided to staff in relation to obtaining the flu vaccine and a risk profile has been conducted with each staff member to assist logistics and timeliness for their working from home transition. Currently approximately 80 percent of staff members are working from home. In all aspects of our shifting environment proposed operations are being considered as to their compatibility with the *Human Rights Act 2019*.

We believe our COVID-19 response has been necessary and proportionate. We have, and will continue to, ensure that our response is consistent with government protocols in relation to the pandemic whilst

maintaining the objects of the FRC Act in providing support to FRC communities. We will, however, continue to face operational challenges in the ever-changing climate caused by the pandemic to source viable solutions that offer protection and support to the vulnerable people of Aurukun, Coen, Doomadgee, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge.

3. Governance

Governance

Part 12 of the Act provides for the establishment of the Family Responsibilities Board (the Board).

The Board has a mandate to give advice and make recommendations to the Minister about the operation of the Commission and similarly to give advice and make recommendations to the Commissioner about the performance of the Commission's functions.

The Board must meet at least every six months. The meeting may be held by using any technology available which will allow for efficient and effective communication, however, the Board members must meet in person at least once a year. A quorum for the Board is comprised of two members. The Board's membership consists of the following members:

- Dr Chris Sarra Director-General, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (Chair)
- Mr Ray Griggs AO, CSC CEO, National Indigenous Australians Agency
- Mr Noel Pearson Founder, Cape York Partnership representing the Cape York Institute.

Operational

In meeting obligations under Part 3 of the Act, the Family Responsibilities Commission Registry (the Registry) commenced operations on 1 July 2008 with a central Registry office established in Cairns and local Registry offices operating in each of the five welfare reform communities.

The Registry, managed by the Registrar, provides corporate and operational support to the Commissioner, the Local Commissioners and the Local Coordinators.

4. Financial Operations

Income:

- Income received by the Commission for the period 1 January 2020 to 31 March 2020 totalled \$1,023,607. This income consisted of:
 - \$409,000 Queensland Government funding
 - \$156,500 Queensland Government funding – Doomadgee
 - \$450,000 Australian Government funding
 - \$8,094 interest received
 - \$13 received in sundry income.

The balance of available funds in the bank as at 31 March 2020 is \$3,995,756.

Expenditure:

- Expenditure for the period 1 January 2020 to 31 March 2020 was \$850,614.

Table 6: Expenditure in quarter 47.

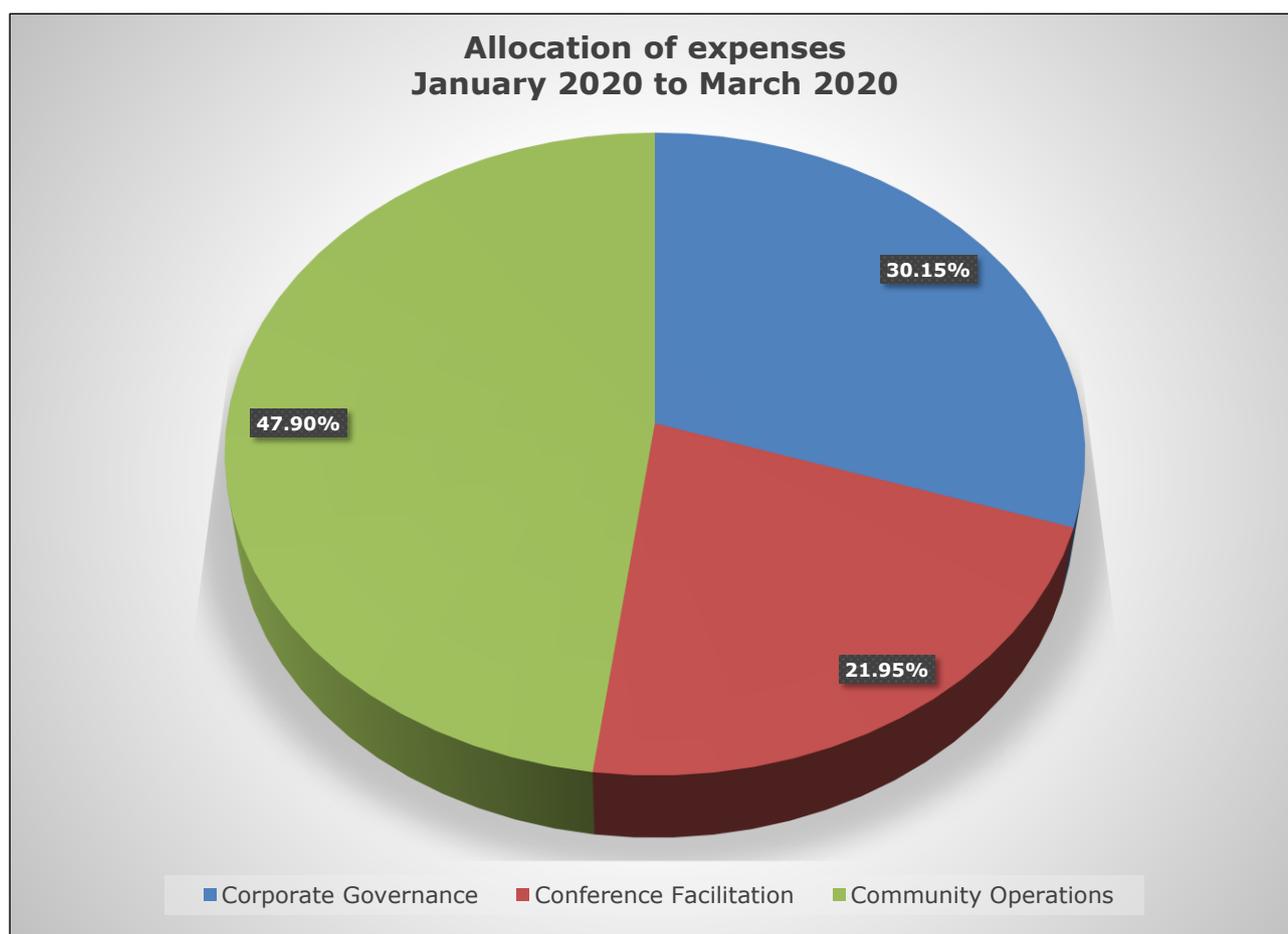
1 January 2020 to 31 March 2020	Expenditure Qtr 47	1 January 2020 to 31 March 2020	Expenditure Qtr 47
Employee salaries – FRC staff	\$383,621	Internet & IT	\$55,934
Employee salaries – Local Commissioners	\$112,550	Motor vehicle	\$9,686
Employee on costs – FRC staff	\$77,232	Property	\$55,149
Employee on costs – Local Commissioners	\$16,038	Travel	\$41,776
Other employment costs	\$9,070	General operating	\$71,822
Communications	\$3,129	Other expenses	\$14,607
			\$850,614

The core functions of the FRC can be summarised into three broad categories:

- **Corporate Governance:** including corporate governance, finance, statistical reporting, training and other administrative functions to ensure the effective and efficient operations of the Commission.
- **Community Operations:** including the operational costs in each of the five communities to conduct conferences, prepare and monitor case plans for clients for attendance at community support services and prepare and monitor income management orders.
- **Conference Facilitation:** including to facilitate the holding of conferences in the five communities, provide support to the Local Commissioners and Local Coordinators to hold conferences, assist with the on-going monitoring of case plans for clients through the provision of data and other information and process income management orders where considered necessary.

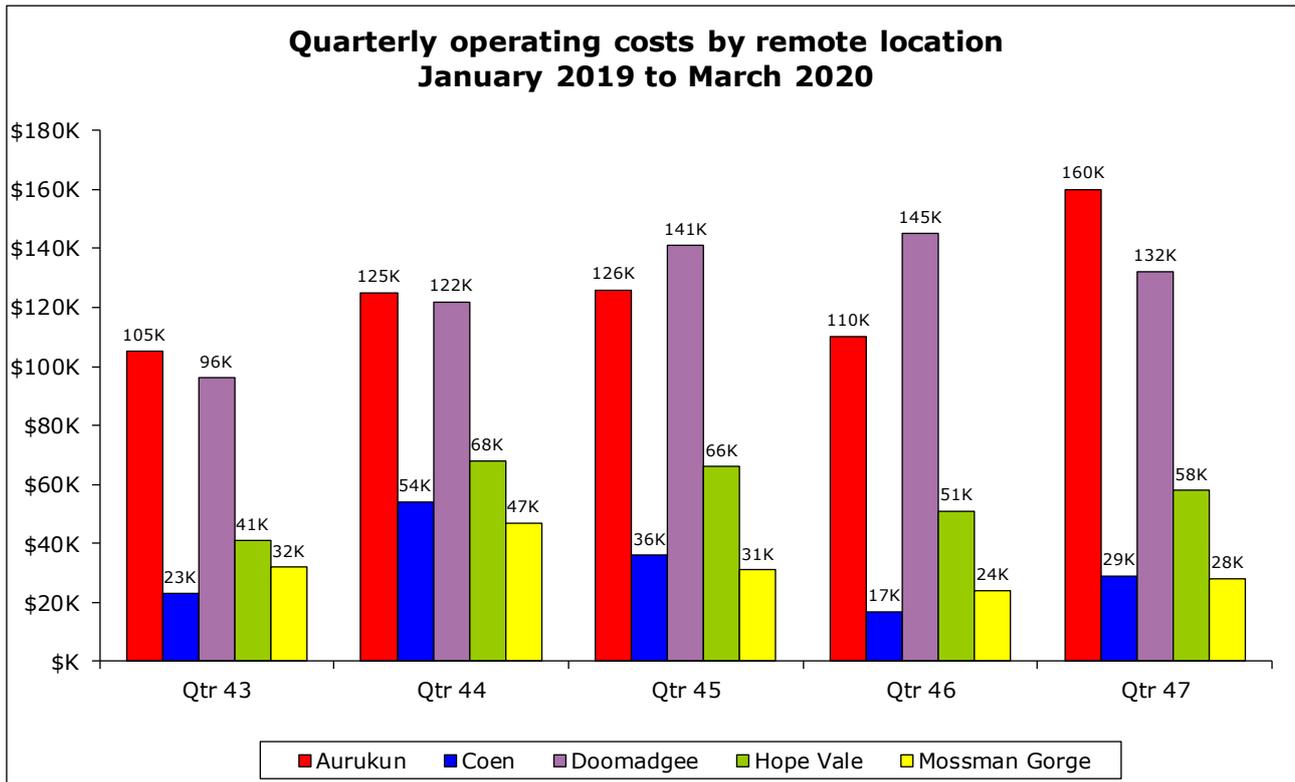
The functions of corporate governance and conference facilitation are conducted primarily in the Registry office in Cairns with frequent visits to community by staff. Community operations are conducted by Local Coordinators (with one of these living remotely in the larger community of Aurukun and twenty-nine Local Commissioners, resident in their respective communities, and are paid as sessional sitting Commission members for conferencing, serving notices, meetings and professional development.

The allocation of the FRC's costs in quarter 47 based on the above core functions is:



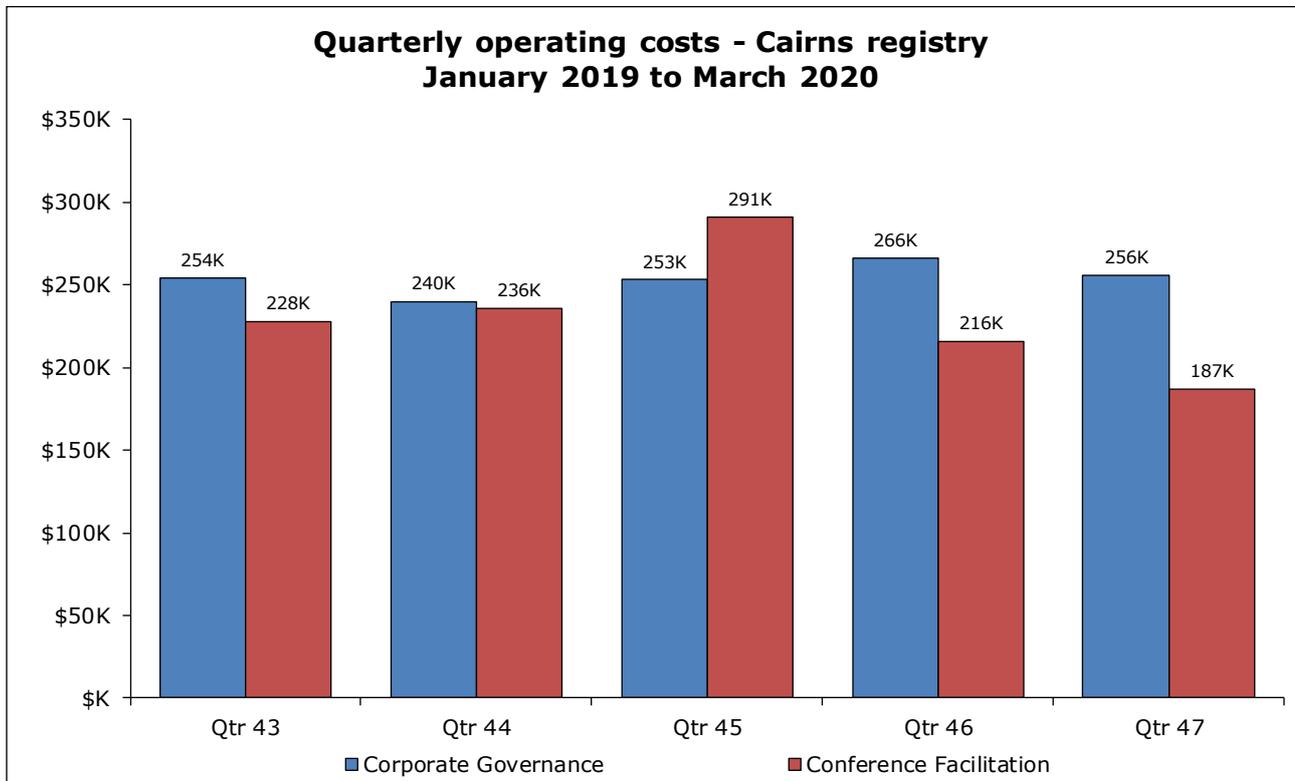
Graph 12: Allocation of expenses 1 January 2020 to 31 March 2020.

Regional operational expenditure by location and quarter.



Graph 13: Operating costs by remote location 1 January 2019 to 31 March 2020.

Cairns expenditure for quarter 47 compared to the previous four quarters.



Graph 15: Quarterly operating costs Cairns 1 January 2019 to 31 March 2020.

APPENDIX A



**SITTINGS CALENDAR 2020
FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES COMMISSION
1 January 2020 to 30 June 2020**



Week Beginning	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Other
30 December			Public Holiday			1 New Year's Day
6 January						Cooktown Circuit
13 January						Doomadgee – Gulf Circuit Aurukun Cape B & Coen Cape A Circuit
20 January						
27 January	Public Holiday	28	29	30		27 Australia Day Public Holiday
3 February		4	5	6		Cooktown Circuit
10 February		11	12 ½ day	13		Doomadgee – Gulf Circuit
17 February		18				18 ASC Meeting Aurukun Cape B Circuit
24 February		25 25	26	27 27		
2 March		3 3	4	5 5		Cooktown Circuit
9 March		10	11	12		Doomadgee – Gulf Circuit Aurukun Cape B & Coen Cape A Circuit
16 March		17 17	18	19		17 ASC Meeting
23 March		24	25	26		28 Local Government Council Elections
30 March						Cooktown Circuit
6 April					Public Holiday	10 Good Friday
13 April	Public Holiday					13 Easter Monday
20 April		21	22	23 23		Doomadgee – Gulf Circuit Aurukun Cape B Circuit Saturday 25 Anzac Day – No public holiday
27 April		28	29	30 30		
4 May	Public Holiday	5	6	7		4 Labour Day Cooktown Circuit
11 May		12	13	14		Doomadgee – Gulf Circuit Aurukun Cape B & Coen Cape A Circuit

SITTINGS CALENDAR 2020
FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES COMMISSION
1 January 2020 to 30 June 2020

Week Beginning	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Other
18 May		19 19	20			
25 May		26		28		Cancelled Cairns Local Commissioner Development Week
1 June		2	3 Public Holiday	4		3 Mabo Day - Doomadgee Cooktown Circuit
8 June		9 9	10	11 11		Aurukun Cape B Circuit
15 June		16 16	17	18		Doomadgee – Gulf Circuit
22 June		23 23	24	25 25		
29 June						

LEGEND

	Office Days
	Public Holidays
	Aurukun Sitting
	Aurukun conferences held in Coen
	Coen Sitting
	Doomadgee Sitting
	Hope Vale Sitting
	Mossman Gorge Sitting
∅	Cancelled Conference

OFFICE	CONTACT NAME	Phone	Mobile	Facsimile
Cairns – Commissioner	Ms Tammy Williams	4081 8413	0447 739 137	4041 0974
Cairns – Registrar	Ms Maxine McLeod	4081 8412	0409 461 624	4041 0974
Cairns – Executive Officer (Finance)	Ms Tracey Paterson	4081 8411	0429 495 353	4041 0974
Cairns – Client Manager (Tue/Wed/Thurs)	Ms Camille Banks	4081 8410	0438 195 342	4041 0974
Cairns – Acting Client Manager (Mon/Fri)	Ms Anne Crampton	4081 8414	0419 647 948	4041 0974
Cairns – Community Coordinator (COVID-19 Response)	Ms Sandi Rye	4081 8402	0417 798 392	4041 0974
Aurukun Local Coordinator	Mr Bryce Coxall	4060 6185	0428 985 106	4041 0974
Coen Local Coordinator	Ms Sandi Rye		0417 798 392	4041 0974
Acting Doomadgee Local Coordinator	Mr Brenden Joinbee	4745 8111	0418 666 204	4041 0974
Acting Hope Vale Local Coordinator	Ms Josephine Pinder	4060 9153	0408 482 026	4041 0974
Acting Mossman Gorge Local Coordinator	Ms Josephine Pinder		0408 482 026	4041 0974