

QUEENSLAND CHILD PROTECTION

COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

STATEMENT OF GREGORY SCOTT ANDERSON REGIONAL DIRECTOR DEPARTMENT OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AND MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS

I, Gregory Scott Anderson of Suncorp Building, Mezzanine level, Regional Director, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs, solemnly and sincerely affirm and declare:

ROLE

1. I have held senior positions in the Queensland Public Service for the past 15 years, across the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs (DATSIMA) and its predecessor agencies. I have held my current position of Regional Director North Queensland region, DATSIMA for the past eight years.
2. The DATSIMA North Queensland region includes 18 local government areas: Boulia, Burdekin, Burke, Carpentaria, Charters Towers, Cloncurry, Doomadgee, Flinders, Hinchinbrook, Isaac, McKinlay, Mackay, Mornington Island, Mount Isa, Palm Island, Richmond, Townsville and Whitsunday. A map of the region is attached for the Commission's information.
3. As a Regional Director, I am required to lead the coordination of service delivery, engagement and planning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the region, ensuring quality partnerships are developed with Indigenous communities and organisations, and state and commonwealth agencies and ensure their input into the delivery of services.
4. DATSIMA regional offices provide local coordination across key government departments, such as the Department of Education, Training and Employment, the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (DCCSDS) and the Department of Housing and Public Works, as well as non-government service providers.
5. DATSIMA has a role to provide advice on engagement methods and facilitate forums for issues to be discussed with Indigenous Queenslanders. This is particularly important in the local and regional context where DATSIMA facilitates various processes to gather local community input and responses and then directly works with local service providers to influence practice and service delivery methodology. Information is also fed upwards to inform regional and state wide program and policy development.

Notifications and Data

6. Through my regional office's dealings at officer level with local and regional staff within DCCSDS we are aware that the state-wide picture of Aboriginal and

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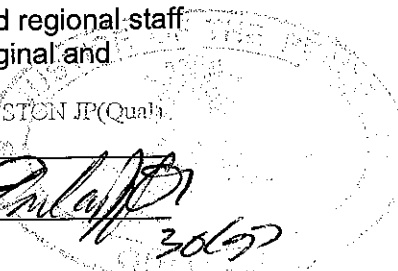
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Torres Strait Islander over-representation in the child protection system is also the case in Mount Isa and North West Queensland.

Regional Strategies to Address Service Delivery Challenges

7. DATSIMA is committed to closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage and meeting the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) targets by performing a key role in leading and coordinating the Queensland urban and regional strategy – LEAP: Learning Earning Active Places strategy (the LEAP Strategy). The LEAP strategy outlines how the government will work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to improve access to education, employment, health and housing opportunities in urban and regional areas.
8. In North West Queensland, delivery of the LEAP strategy is mainly focussed in the Mount Isa suburb of Pioneer and the Gulf township of Normanton. Both of these locations are characterised by a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents, a high percentage of social housing, low rates of economic participation and a high proportion of families/individuals in receipt of social welfare payments.
9. Examples of some of the LEAP projects delivered in these areas in 2011-12 include:
 - the *Pioneer Play Group In The Park*, to enhance the capacity of playgroups in Mt Isa to cater for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0 to 5 years. Approximately 8 - 15 families participate in the playgroup on a regular basis which provides support to parents to work with their children to use their motor skills in obstacle courses, drawing, painting, and reading and play dough activities,
 - the *Cooking with Mum, Aunty or Grandma and Manual Arts with Dad, Uncle and Grandad* projects, which organised family-centred activities around cooking and manual arts to improve family functioning and support the transmission of cultural practices and history in Normanton,
 - the *Closing the Gap Health Family Fun Day* which was held in Pioneer, Mount Isa in March 2012. This event was attended by 200 community members of all ages and was able to assist in closing the gap in child health by making contact with parents who had missed their appointments for their children to be immunised, and
 - the *Closing the Gap Health Promotion Day*, coordinated by DATSIMA and held in May 2012. This event targeted parents and educated them about the local playgroups and encouraged their children to attend, as well as providing health checks for people attending.
10. DATSIMA's role in whole-of-government coordination and community engagement in the discrete communities of Mornington Island and Doomadgee is to support and participate in the single Australian/Queensland government interface as detailed in the *National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery*.
11. The Agreement covers the priority locations of Mornington Island, Doomadgee, Hope Vale and Aurukun together with continuing work in Mossman Gorge and Coen, which are part of the Cape York Welfare Reform Trial.

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12. The overarching goal of the *National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery* (RSD) is to close the gap in disadvantage faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote communities.
13. The objectives of the RSD are to:
- Improve the access of Indigenous families to a full range of suitable and culturally inclusive services.
 - Raise the standard and range of services delivered to Indigenous families to be broadly consistent with those provided to other Australians in similar sized and located communities.
 - Improve the level of governance and leadership within Indigenous communities and Indigenous community organisations.
 - Provide simpler access and better coordinated government services for Indigenous people in identified communities.
 - Increase economic and social participation wherever possible, and promote personal responsibility, engagement and behaviours consistent with positive social norms.
14. DATSIMA delivers on these strategies through leading, supporting and facilitating government and community engagement to develop community based plans and projects and then monitoring, coordinating and reporting on progress against the activities.
15. Examples of initiatives in the RSD communities of Doomadgee and Mornington Island include:
- The community, government and Ergon Energy working together to repair and install street lighting in both communities to enhance safety.
 - The Gulf Financial Wellbeing team has also been set up to provide money management information to help local families in the area.
 - The Parents Supporting Learning (PSL) program has been committed to commence in 2012-2013, providing school and community based case management teams to support families of students at risk of, or already, disengaging from school.
 - The investment in increased services and infrastructure on Mornington Island through RSD has seen a significant increase in local employment opportunities and efforts by providers to recruit and develop local capability.
 - Local participatory research work on community safety has driven development of the Mornington Island Community Safety Action Plan (CSAP).
 - A new Outreach Midwife Service supported by an Indigenous Health Worker commenced in 2011 delivering antenatal screening, advocacy, referral services and support for mother and family during and after pregnancy, hospital stay and through first year of life in Doomadgee.
 - Wellbeing Services established in Doomadgee to deliver integrated, community based and culturally appropriate counselling and locally developed support programs addressing drug, alcohol and social/emotional wellbeing issues.

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Regional examples of Partnering with Government agencies

16. As part of our whole-of-government leadership role, DATSIMA in North Queensland is facilitating a project across various Departments and Service Centres to develop Indigenous Local Service Delivery Improvement Plans. The plans are developed jointly between DATSIMA and the relevant agency service centre and are designed to assist our government partners in the provision of enhanced service delivery that is appropriate and accessible to the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The process enables the service centres to take advantage of the community and cultural skills and knowledge of the DATSIMA team in each location in developing goals and actions and it provides a mechanism for local service delivery to be shaped by the ideas and inputs generated from the DATSIMA-led community engagement activities.
17. DATSIMA has engaged with the Child Safety Service Centres located in Mount Isa to develop Indigenous Local Service Delivery Improvement Plans. The specific goals contained in the plans are to:
- Encourage and promote staff to develop and strengthen relationships within the North West Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to achieve greater cultural awareness in the provision of services to clients.
 - Establish and maintain an awareness of child safety services within local Indigenous communities.
 - Build staff capability to deliver Indigenous services that centre on department values of client focus, collaboration, diversity and professional integrity.
 - Provide a more culturally appropriate service centre and increase opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to stay connected to their culture whilst in care.
18. Some practical ways in which these goals are being achieved include –
- Promoting and encouraging government staff members from DCCSDS to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural dates and events such as NAIDOC, Sorry Day and Reconciliation week.
 - Assisting DCCSDS to utilise the processes available under the public sector Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment initiative currently titled Project 2800. Project 2800 is a Queensland Government initiative committed to providing employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the public sector. This project is part of the broader commitment to boost the representation of Indigenous employees in the Queensland Public Sector. DCCSDS have embraced this policy in Mount Isa and recruited a number of Indigenous staff.
 - Development and delivery of the local "Connecting with Culture" project. Phase 1 of this saw the family rooms at the Mount Isa Child Safety Service Centre become more accessible and culturally accommodating with the display of cultural paintings by local Kalkadoon artist Ms Barbara Sam. Phase 2 involved the engagement of a number of young people on child safety orders to participate in a series of art workshops facilitated by Ms Sam. Through her art, Barbara was able to share her story, history and key messages to encourage the young people to stay connected with their culture, be proud of who they are and where they come from.

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19. DATSIMA coordinated an Elders and Leaders meeting in Mount Isa in July 2011 which raised concerns and questions around Child Protection. As a result a Child Safety Community Forum was held which included political representatives, DCCSDS, DATSIMA, local government and non-government agencies, local Elders and community members. The forum promoted discussion around child protection matters and gave service providers and community members an improved understanding of child safety products and services. In an attempt to break down barriers between the community and Child Safety, local elders invited Child Safety to attend the local women's group on a weekly basis.
20. DATSIMA works in partnership with DCCSDS to conduct a number of community activities on an annual basis to celebrate and acknowledge Child Protection Week, through the Family Fun Day celebrations. DATSIMA has assisted to educate school children around personal safety and promoting foster and kinship carers such as school teddy bear picnics, family fun days and carer promotion days.
21. DATSIMA coordinates monthly Yallambee Stakeholders meetings to improve service delivery for the residents of the Yallambee Aboriginal Reserve, and ensures DCCSDS is an active member at these meetings to discuss and provide enhanced services to mutual clients. In November 2011, Child Safety Services Mount Isa, Mount Isa Police and the Coordinator for Brilla Brilla (a service located at Yallambee) met to discuss the way the agencies engaged with Yallambee residents. As a result of this meeting, communication improved between the agencies and the residents at Yallambee. A Yallambee Information Brochure was developed to provide government and non-government agencies in Mount Isa with information on the Yallambee Aboriginal Reserve and options for engaging with the residents at Yallambee.
22. DATSIMA regularly liaises with DCCSDS to develop activities and events under the LEAP Strategy within the North West Queensland area. There is a strong focus for Foster and Kinship carers and children to participate in community and cultural events.

Current Challenges

23. Agencies have advised that confidentiality provisions within the *Child Protection Act 1992* and the recruitment of Indigenous employees into the public sector, particularly Child Safety Services, in regional and remote areas such as Mount Isa, continue to be a challenge for the departments.
24. In our discussions with community, people are often very vocal about government's lack of understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family structures and cultural practices and continually advocate for increased Indigenous staffing numbers in the public service and appropriate legislative change to improve outcomes and understanding. On the job training and an emphasis on life experiences through such measures as Indigenous Traineeships rather than a reliance on formal tertiary qualifications may increase the number of Indigenous people and level of cultural awareness within the Child Safety Service Centres.
25. At numerous community forums, requirements surrounding blue cards have also been raised as a significant barrier to the recruitment of additional Aboriginal and

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Torres Strait Islander carers. The initial application process, the length of time and added administrative burden in challenging any adverse notifications and the need for all adult members of households to apply are all cited as reasons why community members are not volunteering to become carers.

26. In my experience, early intervention and prevention services are critical to support vulnerable families and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children inside the child protection system – but again services must have high standards of cultural awareness and competency in decision making and service delivery.

Conclusion

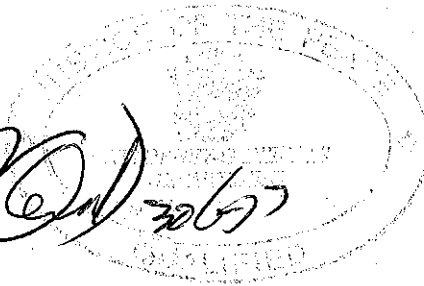
27. DATSIMA is committed to leading whole-of-government policy and program initiatives and community engagement mechanisms at local and regional levels for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members to enable improvements in service delivery design and implementation to occur.
28. Our department will continue to work with DCCSDS and other government and non-government stakeholders to address Indigenous disadvantage, including the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system.

Declared before me at Townsville this ... day of October 2012.

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