

QUEENSLAND CHILD PROTECTION  
COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

Date: 12-9-2012

## STATEMENT OF PATRICIA ANDERSEN

Exhibit number: 64

I, **PATRICIA ANDERSEN** of c/- 107 Lake Street, Cairns the State of Queensland, Manager, solemnly and sincerely affirm and declare:

1. I am the Manager of the Cairns North Child Safety Service Centre (CSSC), Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services.
2. I have been appointed to this position since June 2005 and relieved in the position from February 2004.
3. When planning and reviewing my work and seeking approval for decisions, when required, I report to Arna Brosnan, Regional Director, Far North Queensland Region, Child Safety Services. My position is part of the Far Northern Regional Service Area Leadership Team (SALT) for Child Safety Services.
4. Prior to this appointment I have been employed for over thirty years in various iterations of the Department that addressed Community based issues. I have held a number of positions such as Manager, Family and Community Support; Manager, Community Services Development; and I have relieved as Manager of Cape York CSSC, Atherton CSSC as well as relieving in the Regional Director's position on a number of occasions between December 2007 and January 2012.
5. I hold a Bachelor of Arts (Social Science) conferred in 1985

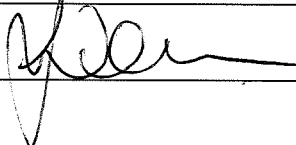
**ROLE**

6. The purpose of my role, as the Manager of Cairns North CSSC is to lead and manage a team of 34 professional, para-professional and administrative staff in the delivery of high quality child protection services to clients and communities who reside within the catchment area serviced by the Cairns North CSSC. This is achieved through the implementation of quality case management systems/practices/standards and service delivery framework, the establishment of enduring productive partnerships with both government and non-government agencies including foster carers, as well as the ongoing professional development and management of staff.
7. This geographic area covered by Cairns North CSSC incorporates the greater Cairns CBD, west to Koah via Kuranda, connecting with the boundary of Atherton CSSC; Northern Beaches north to the Daintree, connecting with the Cape South CSSC boundary; the southern boundary defined as the suburb of Earlville, connecting with the Edmonton CSSC. Additionally Cairns North CSSC incorporates two of the largest suburbs which have a high concentration of indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse groups. There are 26 state and 13 non-government schools in the area and both public and private hospitals are located in the Cairns CBD.
8. My duties and activities include:
  - manage human, physical and financial resources in accordance with relevant government legislation, policies and delegations

Signature of witness to Inquiry



Signature of person witnessing statement



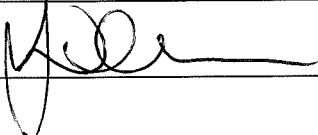
- provide leadership and management in the delivery of high quality child protection services including the development of appropriate and innovative service responses to meet the identified needs of clients
- develop enduring service delivery partnerships to enhance cross-sectoral participation in the delivery of child protection services
- provide proactive high level support, advice and information to regional management in relation to child protection outcomes and improvement strategies.

## OTHER ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

### Service delivery – how well is child protection functioning?

8. The Cairns North CSSC has a very experienced management team collectively having 69 years of child protection experience and leadership within the Department. This averages 8.6 years per member. This has been critical to the operation of a CSSC which has consistently been stretched beyond capacity. The stability of the management team has enabled the CSSC to function at a high level while attempting to meet the statutory and human resource obligations.
9. Cairns North CSSC has operated as a four team office since November 2011 when resources were re-allocated to provide for the temporary appointment of an additional team leader in recognition of the high workload being managed by the CSSC, comparative to other CSSCs in the region. This position has now been permanently allocated to Cairns North CSSC.
10. The Investigation and Assessment (I & A) Team comprises a Team Leader, five Child Safety Officers (CSOs) and one Child Safety Support Officer (CSSO). The catchment area of Cairns North received an average of 34.5 I & As per month over the past six months. Additionally, until January 2012 Cairns North carried a backlog of I & As which emanated from systemic under-resourcing of the I & A team. Following a recent Systems and Practice Review, a backlog team was deployed from other regions, primarily South East Queensland, to assist the Region and in particular, Cairns North CSSC to clear a backlog which comprised 120 notifications not yet allocated or commenced and which involved over 300 children. By June 2012 the backlog team had cleared the outstanding notifications. The following three months saw further increases in the number of notifications in the Cairns CSSC catchment area resulting in the need for the SALT to address the inequitable workloads falling to Cairns North. This was achieved through the re-allocation of I & As to other CSSCs to complete. For example, in August there was a huge spike in Notifications which reached 52 received by the Cairns North CSSC. Of these 14 were re-allocated to other CSSCs and 37 were completed by the Cairns North team. For the first time Cairns North achieved a zero backlog at the end of August 2012 and was able to complete I & As within the required policy timeframes. This obviously is and will continue to be affected by staff leave and CSO vacancies.
11. Due to the constant high workload coming into Cairns North which is unable to be managed within the current resources; and in the spirit of providing equity across the I & A teams within the region, and across the responsibilities of the I & A team leaders, a decision has been made by the Regional Executive Director to trial a regional I&A team for a period of 12 months. The team will be co-located in the Regional Office with a Manager. The Manager's position has been achieved through the temporary re-allocation of regional resources. The team is due to commence in September 2012. This continued growth in Notifications in the Cairns North catchment area has a commensurate increase in Ongoing Intervention (OI)

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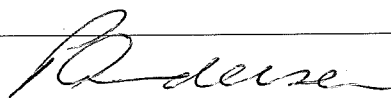
cases for this CSSC.

12. Cairns North has three OI teams which manage a total of 364 Child Protection Orders (CPOs) and Intervention with Parental Agreement (IPA) cases. There are three Team Leaders and 12.5 CSOs across these three teams. Additionally, there is one CSSO attached to the three OI teams. At 1 September 2012 the average caseload per CSO is 29. This compares to 213 CPOs and IPAs in 2007 when the CSSCs had nine CSOs allocated to OI work with an average caseload of 23.7. Despite the high number of cases carried by the Cairns North teams, there has been a steady improvement in the case plan completion rate which sits at 85% at 31 August 2012. Currently, the SALT is considering how to reduce the high caseloads across the two Cairns based CSSCs and ensure equity.

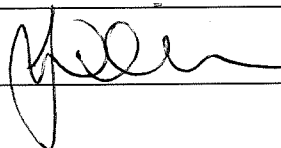
**Key regional examples of service delivery and the identification of any other key persons able to speak to the initiatives**

13. Relinquishment of children with disabilities has become an emerging and on-going problem for Child Safety Services as parents struggle to manage their child/ren within the home with the level of support/resources currently available to them. This has resulted in the need for Child Safety to place the child while an assessment of the parent's willingness and ability is undertaken. The lack of placement options for children, particularly those with disabilities, has necessitated procuring a Highly Complex Placement, resulting in the child usually being placed in a one-on-one care model supported by Youth Workers and managed by one of the Agencies available to provide this type of placement at short notice. This model of care while being extremely expensive is also in stark contrast to the family based care from which the child has been removed. The trauma this creates, especially for a child with disabilities, cannot be understated.
14. In order to address these cases in a more collaborative and child/family focussed manner, I have as CSSC manager, actively sought to bring the parties to the table in order to fully assess the needs of the child and determine family strengths and resources that may be necessary to maintain the child within the family unit. Additionally, identification of the most appropriate disability trained service provider is essential to ensure high quality care for the child and capacity to work with the family. This is to ensure connectedness and potentially, return to family, minus child protection intervention. A recent example of this model has resulted in a child with significant disabilities being transitioned back to the family home with external support from a specialist disability service provider. A Specialist Disability Assessment is being undertaken by Cairns Disability Service Centre and the level of care required for the child within the family will be determined from that assessment. It is hoped that through all of these processes and on-going communication with all stakeholders and extensive family support, that the current child protection interim order is able to be withdrawn. Other examples can be provided.
15. The Cairns CSSC has had a number of case specific investigations whereby a child/ren has been removed due to immediate harm indicators from the custodial parent. However through a thorough assessment process the team has been able to identify either a non custodial parent or other family members who are able to be considered for the ongoing care of the child. This is despite the fact that many custodial parents refuse to divulge details of the other parent or appropriate family members. I am able to provide a number of examples in relation to this. The outcome has been that these children have been reunified with a natural parent or family member and the Department has been able to close the intervention.

Signature of witness to Inquiry



Signature of person witnessing statement



16. We have experienced the removal of large sibling groups who have been forced to separate into a number of placements throughout the region due to lack of capacity of the out of home care system to place a large sibling group. Some innovative responses we have applied have resulted in the children being cared for in their own home by a support worker, while their parent was for example admitted to the Mental Health Unit, rather than placing the children into separate and unfamiliar care environments.

**Agencies, government and non-government that partner with the Department of Communities in providing child protection services or related support services**

17. Staff within certain key government departments may consider that by notifying the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services of their concerns regarding a child or family, they have fulfilled their obligations as a mandatory notifier. This may leave a child in a vulnerable situation as the notification could result in the recording of a ten day response timeframe. The pursuit of a strengthened dual responsibility model and improved relationships with our key partners could ensure that a joint approach to child protection is systematically adopted. For example if a child comes to the notice of a Community Health nurse which results in a notification, a joint visit with Child Safety Services could produce improved outcomes for the child and parent. This is said in the context of providing early intervention and support to the family to address the concerns which may enable the child to be supported in home, that is on an IPA rather than the child being removed, often with a negative outcome for both parent and child. This is an example of a Differential Pathway.
18. The First Response model was implemented in 2012 through Uniting Care Community (UCC) in consultation with the Department as a pilot program to ensure that children entering care of the department for the first time have assessments of their needs completed within the first eight to twelve weeks of the placement. This is to allow for the most appropriate placement matching when the child's strengths and needs have been identified in this initial period resulting in overall placement stability. The model was identified in response to the high number of placements children had experienced in the first twelve months of entering care. The model supports the foster carer to chart the behaviours and responses of the child throughout the course of the placement and provide early and targeted responses to address the behaviours and care needs of the child. The model also supports connection with family and assessment of potential kin carers. This model has the potential to stop the cycle of children who enter care being moved numerous times prior to a full assessment of their needs being completed.
19. The Cairns North CSSC currently has 100 children subject to IPA cases. Within this model services are engaged to respond to the identified needs of the family which are placing the children at risk of harm. Family Intervention Services (FIS) are funded by the department to support families involved in IPAs or where an order is in place for a child and the department is working toward reunification. These services are targeted to offer in-home support to parents and children to address the identified case-plan goals. Due to the high number of indigenous families within the Cairns North catchment area (71%) it is paramount that these families have access to a culturally appropriate service provider and interventions which will assist them to address the child protection concerns. Unfortunately the indigenous services funded to meet this need have not been able to consistently deliver timely and meaningful services to families referred by the department. Referrals then have to be made to other funded services already at capacity. It is clear that support to families whilst children remain in the family home is the preferred intervention when case work supports that option. However, until all of the Family Intervention Services operate within

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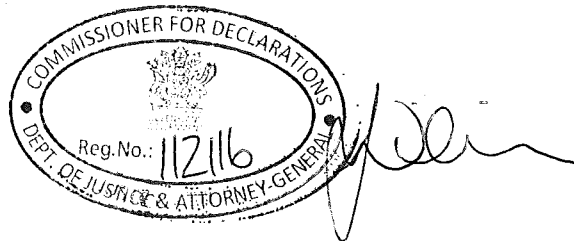
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consistent, targeted and agreed frameworks, families will struggle to meet the case plan goals and potentially will relapse with the child ultimately being removed.

**Current challenges – what needs to be fixed and what if any policies and procedures may be negatively impacting on the way business is conducted?**

20. Placement capacity and the provision of appropriate matching are identified as one of the most pressing problems facing the Far Northern Region and in particular the Cairns CSSC. This often involves children being placed out of area, away from their natural families, their school and their friends. This has significant impacts for children who have been removed from family and suffer the resultant trauma. This is further impacted by the number of children from Cape York and Torres Strait Island communities, who, because of a lack of community based placements, are re-located to Cairns based placements, mostly with non-indigenous carers. Resolution of these issues could be assisted by the provision of more community based options for indigenous children, including residential care. The development of the Safe House model was designed to provide an alternative to children being removed from community in the first instance. The Safe House model has been successful in providing short term options for children however has failed to result in appropriate kin options being identified and progressed. Additionally, the number of available placements in Safe Houses is limited.
21. For Cairns based children, the placement referral needs to remain open until the child is placed within the geographical area of their family and community.
22. It can be said that the current service system in the Region lacks high quality and tenacious early intervention services that can deliver targeted in-home support to families before they enter the child protection system.
23. Increases to the population and demographics of the Cairns CSSC catchment area, particularly the Northern Beaches has resulted in a commensurate number of notifications and children placed on child protection orders. The establishment of an additional CSSC located at Smithfield to meet this demand has been discussed at Senior Executive level since 2007 and needs to remain firmly on the agenda.

Declared before me at Cairns this 6<sup>th</sup> day of September 2012.



Signature of witness to Inquiry \_\_\_\_\_ *R. deese*

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