

8 March 2013

The Hon Tim Carmody, SC
The Commissioner
Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry
PO Box 12196
George St QLD 4003

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BY:

Dear Commissioner

Re Submission in response to the Discussion Paper (February 2013)

Dear Commissioner

We welcome the opportunity to provide input to the Child Protection Commission of Inquiry. This submission addresses Question 47: *What other changes might improve the effectiveness of Queensland's child protection system?*

Firstly, we commend the focus on research and evidence-based policy and practice that is evident throughout the discussion paper, and particularly note the comments in your Overview (at page xiv) regarding *the lack of research and evaluation in Queensland to assist in measuring costs and benefits of various interventions*. We agree the lack of good science informing policy and practice is a significant problem.

We contend that the child protection field will continue to go around in circles, looking for magical solutions that are not there, unless it becomes serious about committing to evidence-based policy and practice. We propose it is crucial that programs of research be embedded in the new directions set by the Inquiry, so that high-quality, meaningful, independent data are available to decision-makers.

There is a considerable research base about aspects of child abuse and neglect. The first challenge is to *test* the international evidence base to ascertain its applicability to the Queensland context, and to *apply* the evidence that is relevant to problems here. Secondly, there is a need to *build* the evidence base, as you have highlighted. There are particular gaps in (1) outcomes research – what works to improve child safety and well-being and family functioning; and (2) research on preventative, ‘family support’ interventions.

Good science is about tackling well-defined, manageable problems. There are no shortcuts here. Research is long-term, time-consuming, and requires collaboration. It develops incrementally. We have to focus on quality and outcomes, and compare different approaches using rigorous and systematic methods of inquiry, in order to generate reliable knowledge for the local context. To date, there has been a tendency to latch onto a program or model and keep investing in it without good evidence of effectiveness – or the reverse problem of abandoning promising programs.

We recognise that there are many influences on public policy and the views of a range of stakeholders must be considered, but obviously we think research has a valuable and important contribution to make to policy. We would like to see a much stronger emphasis on research in the policy and practice choices made in the child protection and family support sectors.

In furtherance of this objective, we particularly commend to you the recent recommendations of a national report, *APS200 – The Place of Science in Policy Development in the Public Service* (2012) hereafter “APS200 Report”.¹ The APS200 Report highlights the difficulties of translating research into effective policy in Australia.

The APS200 Report, commissioned by senior members of the public service in Australia reiterated the vital role that science² plays in development of evidence-based policy. However the Report noted the significant barriers facing the effective integration of research into policy processes, dividing the issues/challenges and related opportunities into five categories:

Timeliness – the timeliness of scientific evidence is critical to its uptake in policy; the right evidence must be seen at the right time by the right people; both the APS and the science community need to prepare for the policy challenges of the future so that scientific research is available when needed.

Cultural – there are cultural challenges that can impede effective interaction between scientists and policy makers; it is important that scientists are policy literate and that policy makers are science literate and that there is sufficient incentive for collaboration between the two.

Relationships – the nature of interactions and communications between scientists and policy makers is critical to ensuring the uptake of science in policy; it is important to support effective networks, knowledge translation and knowledge brokering.

Timeframes – the challenging timeframes associated with policy development can impact on access to and uptake of science at all stages of the policy process; strategies are needed to facilitate access to the right advice within the right timeframe.

Access – there is a need to facilitate access to and use of scientific data and research services to support policy; government can maximise its investments in research and data by encouraging data access, sharing and integration to support further research and policy development.

As a group of researchers committed to maximising impact on public policy, we are gratified to see that the APS Report places the obligation to rectify this deficit squarely on the shoulders of the Australian Public Service (APS), not merely those undertaking research. It is vital that the opportunity to realise the APS200 aspirations is not lost, and that we examine seriously its recommendations in this specific context, and secure the resources for building research partnerships in this field.

We are pleased that during the Inquiry you have been able to hear from many researchers from Griffith University, and other universities, and trust you have found their contributions to be of assistance. We appreciate that their research has been conducted in partnership with the Department, and the Department over time has proven to be a willing research partner. But it is a question of scale and commitment.

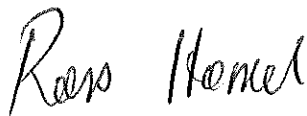
¹ <http://www.innovation.gov.au/Science/Pages/APS200ProjectScienceinPolicy.aspx>

² Science in the APS 200 Report was defined in a broad sense, “embracing all forms of knowledge, and all branches of inquiry, to the extent they are informed by an evidence base. This approach was informed by the United Kingdom Science Council’s definition of science as: the pursuit of knowledge and understanding of the natural and social world following a systematic methodology based on evidence” (APS200 Report). At Griffith University, we similarly embrace a wide definition of science, committed to interdisciplinarity and innovation across disciplines as revealed in the track records of the Key Centre and ARC Centre of Excellence in Policing and Security.

This is not just a question of funding for research, although obviously this is essential. The child protection system in Queensland needs leaders and champions for the cause of evidence-based policy and practice. Building the evidence base needs a serious, long-term investment. We would like to suggest that you make a recommendation along these lines, so that the department is impelled to develop a forward-looking research agenda and make a stronger commitment to evidence-based policy and practice.

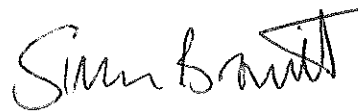
We would be very happy to meet in person to discuss further strategies to build these partnerships.

Yours Sincerely



Ross Homel, AO, PhD, FASSA
Foundation Professor of
Criminology and Criminal Justice
Director, Key Centre for Ethics,
Law, Justice & Governance

Yours Sincerely



Professor Simon Bronitt
Director
Australian Research Council Centre
of Excellence in Policing and
Security (CEPS)
Griffith University