

14 March 2013

The Hon Tim Carmody SC
Commissioner
Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry

Dear Commissioner Carmody,

Re: Response to Child Protection Commission of Inquiry Discussion Paper

Together Queensland, Industrial Union of Employees (Together), welcomes the opportunity to provide a further response in relation to the important work currently underway by the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry.

Over recent months, Together members working in Child Safety roles and functions for the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services have consistently raised concerns in relation to some elements of Queensland's current child protection model that might be addressed to ensure better care for vulnerable children. It is hoped that this comprehensive inquiry will provide a timely avenue for addressing some of the inadequacies of the current system.

Together notes the recent release of a discussion paper from the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry, providing a broad spectrum view of the issues at play in Queensland's child safety system. In response to the discussion paper, our union seeks to highlight some of the long term and systemic underlying workforce problems that workers are hopeful will be recognised and addressed in the Inquiry's final report.

Overwhelmingly, the key workforce issues that Together members have consistently and continually raised are outlined below:

- **Workload and caseload** – Workload expectations of child protection workers remain unrealistic and unreasonable. While this has long been an issue for those undertaking a Child Safety Officer role, it is concerning that over recent years other specialist and support roles are also sharing these workload problems. Disappointingly, a recent survey of Together members in the child protection area, showed that more than 70% of respondents identified workload or caseload difficulties as the number one or two issue affecting them as a worker. Together calls on the Inquiry to address this fundamental issue in its final report by recommending the establishment of a formally instituted system of managing workload and caseload, such as that provided by the Workload Management Guide for Child Safety Service Centres (Provided as an attachment to this correspondence).
- **Resourcing and funding** - Resources and funding to both government and non-government services in the sector are not linked strongly enough with identified needs of Queensland children in care or service delivery requirements as a result of population growth or other factors. Members have identified that this has major impacts on the ability of both tertiary and other services to work together to provide adequate support to families at all stages of the child protection continuum. This feedback was also a strong and consistent theme identified by respondents in a recent member survey with many members stating a belief that without addressing these underlying resourcing and funding deficiencies, the system can and will not improve.

It is also worthwhile noting at this juncture that the issues above are often further compounded in regional, rural and remote locations where the isolated nature of these areas provides an extra layer of complexity in the delivery of services to vulnerable Queensland children and their families.

Finally, I would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate recent media statements made by Together in relation to the release of the Queensland Government Commission of Audit recommendations about possible privatisation of components of the child protection system. As you may be aware, Together has called for all recommendations relating to child safety to be included in the scope of reference for the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry. We feel that, given the comprehensive nature of the Inquiry's review into the child protection system in Queensland, it is illogical and potentially dangerous for any consideration of future privatisation of child safety services to be conducted out of context of the Inquiry's work. Consequently, we would respectfully propose that the Inquiry requests the opportunity to review and consider any child safety related Commission of Audit recommendations prior to finalising its report by 30 June 2013.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alex Scott', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Alex Scott
Secretary
Together