



Queensland
Government

Premier of Queensland
and Minister for Trade

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12 MAR 2004

Senator Steve Hutchins
Chair
Community Affairs Reference Committee
Australian Senate
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600




Dear Senator Hutchins

There have been significant developments since the Queensland Government provided a submission to your Inquiry in 2003. Please find attached a statement which provides the Committee with more detailed information regarding the current situation. It would be appreciated if this document could be tabled at the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care public hearing scheduled for Brisbane on Friday 12 March 2004.

The Queensland Government is committed to improving the child protection system in Queensland. Since August 2003, the Government has undertaken an audit of foster carers and the Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) has conducted an Inquiry into the abuse of children in foster care in Queensland. The recommendations of the Audit and the CMC Inquiry have provided the Queensland Government with a mandate to undertake major reforms to the child protection system.

My Government will implement all of the CMC Inquiry's recommendations as quickly and realistically as possible. Mr Peter Forster of The Consultancy Bureau has been contracted to advise on the implementation of the CMC recommendations. Mr Forster will provide a 'blueprint' for reform to me by the end of March 2004. The blueprint will set out what needs to be done to implement the CMC recommendations and enable a strengthened child protection system to be established and maintained.

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Thank you for providing the Queensland Government with the opportunity to table a statement to the Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'P Beattie', written in black ink.

**PETER BEATTIE MP
PREMIER AND MINISTER FOR TRADE**

Queensland Government

Statement

to the Public Hearing of the

**Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care
highlighting the reform process since August 2003**

MARCH 2004

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1. EXTERNAL AND INDEPENDENT AUDIT OF FOSTER CARERS SUBJECT TO CHILD PROTECTION NOTIFICATIONS

The Queensland Government commenced improvements to the child protection system in Queensland in 1998 and a number of significant achievements and improvements have been made. However, in June 2003, extremely serious allegations of abuse of children in care by foster carers were raised. On 19 June 2003, the former Minister for Families announced an Independent External Audit of Foster Carers subject to Child Protection, which commenced on 20 June 2003.

Phase One of the Audit was completed on 28 November 2003 and Ms Gwenn Murray, External and Independent Reviewer, Foster Carer Audit Team presented the final report on 11 December 2003. The report contains 91 recommendations in 23 broad areas.

The State Government has accepted these recommendations. A number of the recommendations are currently being implemented. For example, improved training for new Family Services Officers and partnership agreements with Universities. The remaining recommendations, particularly those with financial implications are currently being scoped and costed alongside the recommendations of the Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Foster Care.

A copy of the final report, *Final Report on phase one of the Audit of foster carers subject to child protection notifications..... towards child-focussed safe and stable foster care* is accessible at the following address:

http://www.premiers.qld.gov.au/childprotection/audit_audit.html

2. CRIME AND MISCONDUCT COMMISSION (CMC) INQUIRY INTO ABUSE OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

After commissioning the independent external audit, on 28 July 2003 the Premier of Queensland, the Honourable Peter Beattie MP, referred the matters of serious concern to the Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) to conduct an Inquiry.

The terms of reference for the CMC Inquiry were to inquire into and report on the following:

- (a) any systemic factors contributing to the incidence of any abuse of children in foster care;
- (b) the suitability of measures to protect children in foster care from abuse, in particular:
 - the adequacy of systems and procedures to prevent and detect abuse;
 - the adequacy of measures to respond to and deal with suspected abuse including abuse reported by foster carers;
- (c) any recommendations as may be considered appropriate in relation to (a) and (b), including recommendations for any necessary changes to current policies, legislation and practices.

3. IMMEDIATE ACTION TAKEN BY THE STATE GOVERNMENT

In response to the immediate pressures on the former Department of Families, the State Government approved an additional \$4.5M as an acknowledgment of the issues and a

commitment to continuing reform. As a continuation of the reforms begun in 1998, announcements made by Government in August 2003 and September 2003 were:

Child Protection Strategies:

- 40 additional permanent Family Service Officers;
- enhanced training for new Family Services Officers; and
- 15 full-time and 10 part-time Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) Co-ordinators

Quality Assurance and validation:

- 5 additional quality assurance staff to increase the number of audits undertaken annually;
- 9 additional senior practitioners to ensure identified quality deficiencies in regions are addressed

Client Record Keeping and Information Systems:

- contracted client record improvement teams to be deployed during 2003-2004 to ensure current filing systems and record keeping is overhauled; and
- enhance the client data conversion process, to ensure data integrity prior to implementation of the new Integrated Client Management System

4. GOVERNMENT SUBMISSION TO THE CMC INQUIRY

The State Government's published submission to the CMC Inquiry in October 2003 detailed ten (10) actions:

Foster Carers

- i. The Government will review recruitment strategies, payment and support structures offered to foster carers.
- ii. The Government will also investigate alternative placement models of care for children whose needs cannot be met in foster care.

Child Protection Act 1999

- iii. The Government will undertake a review of the implementation and impact of *the Child Protection Act 1999*.

Workforce Reform

- iv. The Government will review the career structure, training and development, as well as support needs, of staff working in child protection.
- v. The Government will ensure that child protection decisions in each area office are reviewed annually, with a capacity for more frequent reviews, where required.
- vi. The Government will adopt an integrated case management model that incorporates the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of other agencies.

Information Sharing

- vii. The Government will continue to review and identify options for improving information-sharing practices across relevant agencies and parties.

Advocacy and Accountability

- viii. The Government will ensure that its accountability mechanisms are operating effectively.
- ix. The Government will increase funding to CREATE Foundation to expand its systems advocacy role.
- x. The Government will improve information management and decision making by:

- accelerating a risk assessment decision support system, in conjunction with the ICMS;
- continuing work on data integrity in area offices; and
- instituting consistent record keeping.

5. FURTHER ACTIONS TAKEN BY GOVERNMENT

In December 2003, the State Government made the decision to implement additional initiatives while awaiting the report on the CMC Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Foster Care in Queensland. The following announcements were made and additional funding was allocated to the former Department of Families:

- Child protection notifications: Address the backlog of child protection notifications by employing 58 additional full-time equivalent staff in area offices (\$2.0M in 2003-2004 as half-year effect, \$4.0M recurrent).
- High needs young people in care: Meet the increasing costs of high needs young people in care (Child Related Costs packages - \$11.7M in 2003-2004 and recurrent).
- Foster carers allowance: Meet the increasing demand for foster care allowance due to the increased in numbers of children in care (Foster Care Costs - \$2.5M in 2003-04 and recurrent).
- Non-Government Grants Indexation: Meet the escalating indexation costs in order for Government to continue to implement the Future Directions Initiatives announced in 2002-2003 (\$4.1M in 2003-04; \$8.4M in 2004-2005; \$12.8M in 2005-2006; \$17.4M in 2006-2007; and \$22.1M in 2007-2008).
- *Commission for Children and Young People Act 2000*: Enhance the powers of the Commission for Children and Young People to provide for better access to information required to perform their monitoring function (\$0.165M in 2003-2004; \$0.416M in 2004-2005 and \$0.43M in 2005-2006 recurrent).
- *Child Protection Act 1999*: Commence a review of the *Child Protection Act 1999* (within existing funds).

6. CMC INQUIRY REPORT ON AN INQUIRY INTO ABUSE OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

On Tuesday 6 January 2004, the CMC delivered a report titled, *Protecting Children: An inquiry into abuse of children in foster care*, with 110 recommendations for an improved child protection system to State Parliament. The CMC Inquiry Report was compiled after holding a public inquiry and two investigations in the second half of 2003 into allegations of serious systemic failings in the State's foster care system. The package of recommendations produced by the CMC is designed to restore community trust in a new and better child protection system, with a much stronger focus on the safety and security of children at risk. A full copy of the report is accessible at the following internet address:

http://www.premiers.qld.gov.au/childprotection/cmc_inquiry.html

The Government accepted the recommendations and established an Implementation Steering Committee and Child Protection Implementation Unit, led by independent consultant, Mr Peter Forster of The Consultancy Bureau, to develop a Blueprint for the Child Protection Reforms. The Implementation Steering Committee is made up of the Director-General, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Director-General, Department of Communities, Acting Director-General, Department of Child Safety, the Under-Treasurer and the Commissioner for Children and Young People. Mr Forster reports to the Premier as the chair of a Cabinet Committee overseeing the reform process.

The Blueprint for Child Protection Reforms is to be delivered to the Premier and the Cabinet Committee in March 2004 and will show:

- the detail of new structural, management and service delivery arrangements;
- new service practices focussing on the needs of the child;
- resource requirements for the new Department of Child Safety and the child protection functions of other Government and non-government organisations;
- the necessary steps to establish an effective Information and Client Management System in a timely manner;
- the legislative changes required to give effect to the CMC's recommendations and new service delivery arrangements;
- the most effective way to ensure that the child protection system meets the needs of Indigenous children;
- mechanisms for the Government and non-government sector working together to deliver better outcomes for children in care;
- the development of broader placement options for children to ease the pressure on foster care places and provide alternative settings for children not suited to a foster care environment;
- the detail of how human resource and training needs of the new Department will be managed; and
- a detailed plan for enhancing internal and external accountabilities within the child protection system.

7. PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT: EDUCATING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE CARE OF THE STATE

The Partnership Agreement: Educating Children and Young People in the Care of the State (the Agreement) was released in January 2004 in response to the recommendations of the report of the Education Caucus Committee Working Party. The Agreement formalises the commitment of Education Queensland and the former Department of Families to educational planning as a means of increasing the participation, retention and attainment of children and young people in care in the education system.

The Agreement is based upon the understanding that the needs of children and young people in care are best met through an integrated approach across government and that the Government has a specific responsibility to ensure that every effort is made to improve access to education for this group of children and young people.

Education Queensland and the Department of Communities (formerly Families) are working together to implement the Partnership Agreement in collaboration with other supporting partners such as Queensland Health, Disability Services Queensland, the Commission for Children and Young People, the CREATE Foundation and Foster Care Queensland.

A central component of the Agreement is the development of an Education Support Plan (ESP) for every child or young person subject to a child protection order that grants custody or guardianship to the chief executive. The development, implementation and regular monitoring of Education Support Plans will contribute to addressing the needs of children and young people in a holistic way; facilitate stability and consistency in their schooling experience; coordinate the work of government and non-government agencies concerned with the well being and development of the child or young person; facilitate the development of early intervention strategies; and maximise educational outcomes for all children and young people in care.

In addition, in November 2003, Parliament passed the Education and Other Legislation (Student Protection) Bill. This legislation makes it mandatory for staff in both State and Non-State schools for staff to report sexual abuse or suspected sexual abuse of students to the

principal/headmaster and for the principal/headmaster to then report the matter to Police. The legislation also provides greater powers to the Board of Teacher Registration and Commission for Children and Young People to ensure those people working in schools are suitable and remain suitable to work with children.

Details and reports can be accessed from: <http://education.qld.gov.au/students/incare/>