

Hope Vale Local Commissioners
FRC
1/3 Muni Street
HOPE VALE

29 November 2018

Dr Chris Sarra
Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships
PO Box 15397
CITY EAST 4002

Dear Dr Sarra

We, the Hope Vale FRC Commissioners, are upset and angry that the people who say they want to do things with us, not to us, are actually doing the total opposite. The Queensland Government has decided to transition from the FRC to move us from surviving to thriving, under your Thriving Communities. You must be very clear after talking to us that we do not support in any way your proposal, which you could not explain to us in detail. In Hope Vale we are not just surviving, we are already thriving. We have made things better under our own steam over a long time.

We have changed the social fabric within our community by the work we have done. Let us build on that. You have not tried to work with us as real partners at all. The fly in/fly out consults this year do not provide any support for what you say you are doing. People were not saying get rid of the FRC and give us your new version. You are trying to drive wedges between us and the people we work with. The FRC has given us real power and authority. What powers and authority will our leaders and elders have under your Thriving Communities? We would like you to know that our clients feel supported, not punished by us, and the FRC and welfare reform were not imposed on us.

The Queensland Government needs to start dealing with us in good faith and with respect. We have learned a lot in the 10 years since we started and it seems to be the most promising approach for our community that we have seen. Our conferences are community controlled and we wish to remain as community controlled. We should be working together, not separately.

Please listen to our views and know that we are not against change, we are against change for the sake of change.


Commissioner Doreen Hart


Commissioner Cheryl Cannon


Commissioner Selena Bowen


Commissioner Victor Gibson


Commissioner Erica Deeral

Commissioner Doreen Hart
Cnr of Poland and Beach Roads
HOPE VALE

29 November 2018

Dr Chris Sarra
Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships
PO Box 15397
CITY EACH 4002

Dear Dr Sarra

As you correctly pointed out yesterday I was upset particularly because of what the Minister said on Tuesday after listening to us six Commissioners.

I am upset and angry that people who say they want to do things with people not to them, are actually doing the total opposite.

I have sent to you a copy of my notes of yesterday's interrupted discussions.

You say government should not impose things on us. But then you say the Qld Government has decided to transition from the FRC to move us from surviving to thriving, under your Thriving Communities. This does not sit well with me.

You should let our people in Hope Vale and the other Communities decide the future of the FRC. We Hope Vale Commissioners have been invited on several occasions to meet with and discuss our processes with Council and leaders of Yarrabah. Lockhart River and Palm Island also seek such a program but apparently the State Government knows better.

You should follow our lead, and empower us as Premier Bligh did at the start. We are all in agreement here.

You must be very clear after talking to us that we do not support your proposal, which you could not explain.

In Hope Vale we are not just surviving. We have made things better under our own steam over a long time. Who are you to say you know better for our own communities? Independent reports show our FRC model works.

What is your proposal, why is it better, what is your evidence? Why haven't we been involved in designing it? Where are the details?

Governments come and go but we will still be here with our families. We have changed the social fabric within our communities by the work we have done. Let us to build on it, don't come in and destroy it. Change takes time and we have worked hard to see all the green shoots. If there is to be any changes, the grassroot people have to be involved in that change and have to lead the change.

The QPC consultations and recommendations also do not provide any support for what you are doing. That was made clear on Tuesday by the reports lead author.

Dr Sarra, you said yesterday that when you look at the money spent on these five communities there is inequality between them and the money spent in other communities. You said, "When you look at the salaries that are earned by people in Cairns and those earned by you as Local Commissioners – well one is up here and you are here". Show us transparency over all the flows of money that go into DATSIP, and into all communities so that we all can see. Only a few years back DATSIP told us the opposite to what you said, they said it was *not* the case that CYWR communities got more than the others. How is anyone to know what to believe?

You do not seem to understand that the FRC has given Local Commissioners real power and authority. What powers and authority will our leaders and elders have under your Thriving Communities? We are all working together on this, it is not us against them.

FRC costs approximately \$3.5 million per year. The costs over the lives of those suffering from all the problems typical of our FRC clients, would suggest that if the FRC changes the lives of some of our clients we are paying for ourselves.

You call the FRC "punitive" and you said "From my perspective nobody wins because the FRC approach says to Aboriginal people 'You are so

hopeless that we will force you to get your kid to school by taking money from you!”.

You are very wrong about the FRC. Our clients feel supported not punished and you just have to talk to people or read the reports to know this. Many local Cape York people want these reforms and it is not because they see their family and fellow community members are hopeless. It is the opposite.

We understand that the system itself must change so that our people can escape from poverty and disadvantage. The FRC and CYWR were not imposed, they are community-driven reforms. The reforms were designed with us over 2 years by people living in the community.

You have said on the public record that nothing will change your mind about our work at the FRC. In 2009 you said you “challenge its advocates to enable external evaluation”, but also if it does show improvements the FRC “still would not stack up against the triple bottom line of good policy”. So how can we win? You made up your mind before you came to DATSIP and you have said you will not change it for anything.

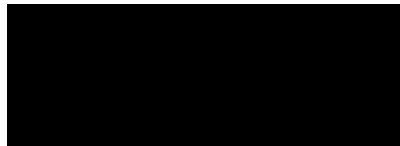
When there was positive improvements in school attendance in 2009 after the start of the FRC you said, “the real reason children are turning up is because of changes that had been made inside the school”, although you didn’t provide any evidence to back up these claims. In fact, the evidence backs what we know to be true.

There *is* a direct connection between improvements in school attendance and FRC conferences held by local FRC Commissioners. The 2018 independent review, about to be released, shows FRC intervention extends the time between breach notifications for individuals to the FRC. The 2013 evaluation provides data showing the FRC’s conferencing is followed by an increase in school attendance of the children of those conferenced. The FRC is a restorative justice model that works. We know the results. Where is your data like this?

Your views seem to be putting at risk everything we have worked so long for. Isn’t this a serious conflict of interest?

Qld government needs to start dealing with us in good faith and with respect. We have learnt a lot in the 10 years of CYWR and FRC and it seems to be the most promising approach for our communities seen

anywhere. The FRC and CYWR are community-controlled welfare reform. They must remain community-controlled. We should be working together.



Commissioner Doreen Hart

Cc: Minister Jackie Trad

Aurukun Local Commissioners
CJG Building
Wuungkah Street
AURUKUN

30 November 2018

The Honourable Anastacia Palaszczuk MP
Premier of Queensland
thepremier@premiers.qld.gov.au

Dear Premier

We are very upset and worried about the bombshell announcement made this week that imposes a government decision on our communities without us having a voice in the decision-making process. The Deputy Premier said:

“In response to the QPC report, the Queensland Government has made a long term commitment to work with the 19 remote and discreet Indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and community leadership and other key stakeholders to implement this agenda, and what we have learned over time more broadly. This includes **transitioning the FRC and welfare reform communities Aurukun, Hope Vale, Mossman Gorge, Coen and Doomadgee from the FRC Cape York Welfare Reform to what we are calling the Thriving Communities approach.**”

We do not understand at all how the Queensland Government can respond to a QPC report that says government needs to empower and enable us, and stop controlling and managing our communities, by imposing this decision on us without any genuine consultation at all.

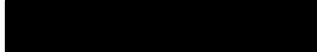
This is the first we have heard of Thriving Communities and we cannot support the government imposing it on us to replace all our hard work over more than 10 years. As Aurukun Local Commissioner Ada Woolla stated in Brisbane on Tuesday, with the Deputy Premier present: “Take Welfare Reform away from our community, all our communities will go backwards. We will all fail. We want to drive this Family Responsibilities ourself, in our community, because we are the grassroot people. We are the ones who should be making decisions for our community, not anybody else.”

We want to lead change in our own communities and build on the work we have done in the ways we know will work. Each community is different and it needs to be respected that we are the ones that know exactly what needs to be done in our communities. Government deciding alone on a one-size-fits all approach will not work.

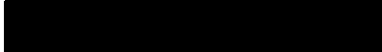
A senior government representative has told some of us this week not to worry about what the Queensland Government has decided to do, because “you will be looked after”. But our work at the FRC isn’t about looking after ourselves, it is about what is good for all our people. We are asking you to work with us, not make a decision of government, about the future of the FRC and CYWR, until you can sit down with us and hear our stories.

Yours sincerely

Commissioner Ada Woolla



Commissioner Edgar Kerindun



Commissioner Doris Poonkamelya



Commissioner Dorothy Pootchemunka



Commissioner Vera Kooomeeta



Commissioner Keri Tamwoy



Mossman Gorge Local Commissioners
Mossman Gorge Road
MOSSMAN GORGE

30 November 2018

The Honourable Anastacia Palaszczuk MP
Premier of Queensland
thepremier@premiers.qld.gov.au

The Honourable Jackie Trad
Deputy Premier and Minister for
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Partnerships
Deputy.premier@ministerial.qld.gov.au

Dear Premier Palaszczuk and Minister Trad

We write deeply concerned about a meeting called this week, with the Director General of DATSIP, Dr Chris Sarra, on the day of a special celebration to mark 10 years of successful reform led by our people.

Our Community as a result of leadership and the Cape York Welfare Reform model has transformed our little town and our people. We took a strong stand more than 10 years ago, and worked hard in the design phase, to develop a comprehensive attack on the dysfunction that was plaguing our community. Change takes time but we are succeeding.

We have built this over a long period, and we have built something that is right for our people. It wasn't just a thought bubble that produced "Cape York Welfare Reform". We had 2 Years of Workshops and Engagement officers working on co-design before the start of it. We don't want you to take all our hard work, and we don't want new shirts and a new name given to us by DATSIP. That would be starting again from scratch, without the solid foundations we built ourselves for Cape York Welfare Reform and the FRC.

We are living the change firsthand. Ten years ago we really doubted Noel Pearson when he said we needed to get 100% of our children at school every-day. Most of our children now attend school everyday thanks to the work of the Family Responsibilities Commission and the Cape York Welfare Reform model that supports it.

We have the Visitors Centre, jobs, primary school kids attending around 80% of the time, our health is improving. We are breaking the cycle.

During the meeting with Dr Sarra, he could not explain or give reasons for what we had done wrong, or why the FRC would be replaced. As you would be aware, the FRC legislation provides us, as local cultural leaders, with the power to help our family and community members make lasting behavioural change. To lose this would be foolish. Dr Sarra didn't say with his change if we will still have real powers to help our people, or will it just be the shirt and the new name.

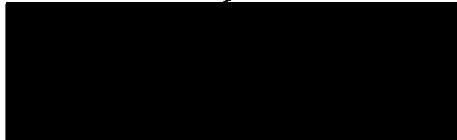
During the meeting Dr Sarra, said that we Commissioners 'would be looked after', but we wish to impress that our priority is our community, our families, and culture and building love and prosperity in our community. Dr Sarra also suggested that people in Cairns were running the show. We can assure you that this model is driven on local leadership, local authority and local decision-making.

This idea to abandon the Family Responsibilities Commission and Cape York Welfare Reform rather than build upon it is unjust. We again are being 'done to'. The Australian Government has committed to let the people of Mossman Gorge themselves decide the future of the services and funding and the Queensland Government should do this too. We have been working hard to co-design this as the way forward. The Queensland Government approach is a backward step, coming from Brisbane not from people on the ground.

This idea of moving from surviving to thriving communities coming in new from people who haven't been involved comes across as insulting and shows that you know little about our community, the progress made, and the lives we now lead. We are also disturbed that this decision has been made without consultation with the many other service providers such as the police who support us in our work.

The FRC Commissioners of Mossman Gorge request a meeting as soon as possible with you both, together or separately. We would be happy to join with our fellow Commissioners in other CYWR towns. To disable the FRC will most certainly turn back the clock of progress by 10 years.

Yours sincerely



Commissioner Karen Gibson on behalf of Mossman Gorge Local Commissioner

Doomadgee Local Commissioners
Doomadgee Community Justice Centre
Sharpe St
DOOMADGEE

2 December 2018

The Honorable Anastacia Palaszczuk MP
Premier of Queensland
thepremier@premiers.qld.gov.au

Dear Premier

We are very upset and worried about the bombshell announcement made this week that imposes a government decision on our communities without us having a voice in the decision-making process. The Deputy Premier said:

“In response to the QPC report, the Queensland Government has made a long term commitment to work with the 19 remote and discreet Indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and community leadership and other key stakeholders to implement this agenda, and what we have learned over time more broadly. This includes **transitioning the FRC and welfare reform communities Aurukun, Hope Vale, Mossman Gorge, Coen and Doomadgee from the FRC Cape York Welfare Reform to what we are calling the Thriving Communities approach.”**

We do not understand at all how the Queensland Government can respond to a QPC report that says government needs to empower and enable us, and stop controlling and managing our communities, by imposing this decision on us without any genuine consultation at all.

This is the first we have heard of Thriving Communities and we cannot support the government imposing it on us to replace all our hard work over more than 10 years. As Aurukun Local Commissioner Ada Woolla stated in Brisbane on Tuesday, with the Deputy Premier present: “Take Welfare Reform away from our community, all our communities will go backwards. We will all fail. We want to drive this Family Responsibilities our self, in our community, because we are the grassroot people. We are the ones who should be making decisions for our community, not anybody else.”

As Local Commissioners in Doomadgee we are currently able to conference only on school attendance notices and child safety reports. We have previously requested the additional triggers that are available to Commissioners in other communities, however our request was declined. We would like to again request that the additional triggers available to Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge be made available to Doomadgee.

We want to lead change in our own communities and build on the work we have done in the ways we know will work. Each community is different and it needs to be respected that we are the ones that know exactly what needs to be done in our communities. Government deciding alone on one-size-fits all approach will not work.

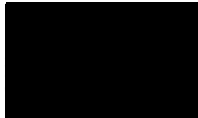
A senior government representative has told some of our Commissioners this week not to worry about what the Queensland Government has decided to do, because "you will be looked after". But our work at the FRC isn't about looking after ourselves; it is about what is good for all our people. We are asking you to work with us, not make a decision of government, about the future of the FRC and CYWR, until you can sit down with us and hear our stories.

Yours sincerely

Commissioner Chris Logan



Commissioner Eleanor Logan



Commissioner Kaylene O'Keefe



Commissioner Elaine Cairns



Commissioner Karen Jupiter



Commissioner Guy Douglas



Coen Local Commissioners
Hub Building
Taylor Street
COEN

3 December 2018

The Honourable Anastacia Palaszczuk MP
Premier of Queensland
thepremier@premiers.qld.gov.au

Dear Premier

We have been left in shock after the announcement made last week by Minister Jackie Trad, decisions have been made by Government about our community of Coen without us having a voice in the decision-making process. We feel disrespected that such an announcement could be made without extensive consultations with Local Commissioners. The Deputy Premier said:

“In response to the QPC report, the Queensland Government has made a long term commitment to work with the 19 remote and discreet Indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and community leadership and other key stakeholders to implement this agenda, and what we have learned over time more broadly. This includes **transitioning the FRC and welfare reform communities Aurukun, Hope Vale, Mossman Gorge, Coen and Doomadgee from the FRC Cape York Welfare Reform to what we are calling the Thriving Communities approach.**”

We do not appreciate at all how the Queensland Government can react to a QPC report that says government needs to empower and enable us, and stop directing and managing our communities, by imposing this decision on us without an honest consultation.

This is the first we have heard of Thriving Communities and we cannot support the government imposing it on us to replace all our hard work over more than 10 years. As Aurukun Local Commissioner, Ada Woolla stated in Brisbane on Tuesday, with the Deputy Premier present: “Take Welfare Reform away from our community, all our communities will go backwards. We will all fail. We want to drive this Family Responsibilities our self, in our community, because we are the grassroots people. We are the ones who should be making decisions for our community, not anybody else.”

We want to lead change in our own communities and build on the work we have done in the ways we know will work. Each community is different and it needs to be respected that we are the ones that know exactly what needs to be done in our communities. Government deciding alone on one-size-fits all approach will not work.

A senior government representative has told some of us this week not to worry about what the Queensland Government has decided to do, because “you will be looked after”. But our work at the FRC isn’t about looking after ourselves; it is about what is good for all our people. We are asking you to work with us, not make a decision of government, about the future of the FRC and CYWR, until you can sit down with us and hear our stories.

Commissioner Garry Port is in agreeance and supports our view as Coen Local Commissioners however is unable to sign the letter after being admitted to hospital for an unfortunate work accident.

Yours sincerely

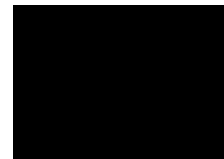
Commissioner May Kepple



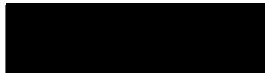
Commissioner Peter Peter



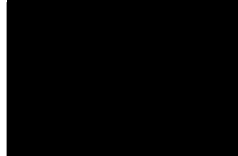
Commissioner Elaine Liddy



Commissioner Alison Liddy



Commissioner Maureen Liddy





Office of the Mayor

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Wednesday 30th January, 2019.

Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk (MP)
Premier and Minister for Trade
1 William Street
BRISBANE Queensland 4000.

Dear Premier Palaszczuk,

Subject: Families Responsibility Commission (FRC)

I write to follow-up on our Expression of Interest to have components of the Family Responsibilities Commission (FRC) expanded to Yarrabah.

We have seen the Qld Government's recent announcement about the FRC, and we urge the government to re-think your decision and not to walk away from the FRC model and to listen to us and enable us locally to lead change.

Many of our Yarrabah families have experienced multiple generations of welfare dependence and the predictably poor education, employment and health outcomes associated with that. Our school attendance, child safety, domestic and family violence, offending and housing tenancy outcomes here in Yarrabah must improve, and we want to drive positive changes for our own people.

We, the Yarrabah Leaders Forum have discussed and agreed that we need:

- a community entity that consists of local people
- is resourced and supported appropriately and
- has legislative authority to hold people accountable.

We have looked at various models including: the Mornington Island and Aurukun Dispute Resolution Models, reviewing the Justice Group and the FRC and identified that what we in Yarrabah need is components of the FRC model.

To clarify this further, we have talked to the Cape York Partnership a number of times about the FRC, and we have also been briefed by existing local FRC Commissioners and understand the positive benefits that a FRC model could bring to our community.

We understand the evidence about the FRC and but more importantly have learnt from the commissioners, the positive impact that this has had on their communities.

We've had discussions with DATSIP's Director General Dr. Chris Sara about the THRIVING Communities approach and while we understand the intent, we don't have the finer details on how this will work to meet our current needs in Yarrabah now.

As a proud community with a long history of battling for self-determination, we are attracted to the notion that the FRC is a structural reform that devolves real powers to our own respected local leaders. We want our local leaders to be the ones empowered to step in and guide our own people to help break the cycle of entrenched disadvantage.

We would like to immediately progress this discussion with the Queensland Government for Yarrabah. We understand the Australian Government is prepared to talk about the expansion of the model and may be prepared to back us. We stand prepared to lead change with our own people to help Close the Gap. It is our aim in Yarrabah to have community control of our own lives and futures.

We look forward to your ongoing support to our community and look forward in a positive response soon.

Yours faithfully,

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Ross Andrews.

Ross Andrews
MAYOR