CONSULTATION SUMMARY 2017

Inquiry into service delivery to remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
We provided a range of ways for stakeholders to participate

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Background

In late 2016, the Queensland Treasurer directed the Commission to undertake an Inquiry into service delivery in Indigenous communities and appointed Professor Bronwyn Fredericks as a Commissioner.

Our inquiry team was asked to look at:

- what the Queensland Government currently spends on services and what is delivered
- better ways to deliver existing government services and manage, coordinate and target services
- the best ways to evaluate services delivered in communities.

There are more than 40 discrete communities in Queensland. Aboriginal communities are mainly on Cape York Peninsula, and the Torres Strait Islands.

We developed a consultation strategy to guide the way we would work with stakeholders in this inquiry, and in particular, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This was due to the wide range of people we knew would be interested in the inquiry, the remoteness of many of the communities, and sensitivities around Indigenous disadvantage.

There are over 40 discrete communities in Queensland, ranging from around 50 people to just over 2,700.
Engagement best practice

Community members are experts in their lives and communities.

Communities have often raised concerns that engagement has been limited to government and researchers informing, rather than real engagement that empowers communities to find their own solutions. The spectrum of engagement is illustrated below.

Indigenous communities are relationship driven, and their governance is networked and dispersed. Research on engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples suggests consultation is most effective where it uses existing community leadership. In many communities, established organisations have the authority to consult with government. Real engagement with community leaders ensures that local views are heard, and decisions are made by the people most directly affected by them.

Effective engagement requires ongoing consultation. It needs to provide people with the opportunity to actively participate—from the earliest stage through to evaluation.

Successfully engaging with Indigenous communities requires:

- knowledge and appreciation of Indigenous history, cultures, social dynamics, and the diversity of Indigenous communities
- relativity to Indigenous concepts of wellbeing
- clarity by all stakeholders about the purpose and the relevant scale for engagement. This may require multi-layered processes
- long-term relationships of trust, respect and honesty as well as ongoing communication
- effective governance and capacity within the Indigenous community and government
- appropriate timeframes.

How did we consult?

The aims of consultation were to:

• support the inquiry process by identifying the full range of policy issues, evidence and views
• allow all interested stakeholders to effectively participate in the inquiry
• ensure the inquiry is appropriately accountable and transparent.

We wanted to hear from a wide variety of people involved in service delivery, including those that are impacted and using services, delivering services and funding services.

The success of this inquiry depends heavily on community residents, leaders and those working in service delivery sharing their experience with us. There are three phases of consultation:

• Phase 1—December 2016 to March 2017: to inform stakeholders about the inquiry, how to get involved, and include them in determining inquiry scope.
• Phase 2—April to June 2017: to identify issues and inform the findings and recommendations of the draft report.
• Phase 3—October 2017: to test the findings and recommendations of the draft report and gather further views and evidence from stakeholders.

Some of the stakeholder groups we identified included:

• community bodies and service providers in communities
• regional bodies representing the collective interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and service providers
• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders
• universities and research organisations
• government agencies, government champions¹, agencies that fund major service delivery programs, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies.

¹ The Queensland Government champions program brings together CEOs of departments and Ministers to partner with individual communities.
We provided a range of ways for stakeholders to participate

Given the differences across stakeholder groups, we adopted a multi-layered approach to consultation, using:

- direct meetings and site visits to communities
- formal written submissions
- roundtables on specific issues
- meetings with government champions and briefings for government agencies.

We also used multiple forms of communication to target content and provide accessibility for all stakeholders, including face-to-face visits, fact sheets, circulars, summary reports, and media information (for Indigenous and non-Indigenous media).

Key stakeholders

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<tr>
<th>COMMUNITIES</th>
<th>SERVICE PROVIDERS</th>
<th>REPRESENTATIVE GROUPS</th>
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<td>Businesses</td>
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<td>Advocacy groups</td>
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How did we receive feedback?

Consultation sessions included:

- meetings with communities (Palm Island, Torres Strait, Cherbourg, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge)
- roundtables in Cairns, Torres Strait and Mt Isa (attended by service providers, peak bodies, land councils, local government and community representatives)
- discussions with Indigenous councils (including meetings with individual councils, mayors, CEOs and the LGAQ Indigenous Leaders Forum)
- meetings with Indigenous leaders from Cape York and Torres Strait
- phone conferencing with the Coen community, Burke Shire Council, Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire Council, NSW Department of the Premier and Cabinet, NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs, and the Australian Government
- discussions with academic experts in the field of Indigenous affairs
- meetings with service providers including community groups (for example, community justice groups, Family Responsibilities Commission, Aboriginal community controlled organisations, and external government and non-government service providers)
- meetings with key government agencies (including Queensland Treasury, Public Service Commission, and departments of Premier and Cabinet; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships; Health; Education and Training; Police; Communities; Child Safety and Disability Services; Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning; Housing and Public Works)
- meetings with advocacy groups and peak bodies (such as Bamanga Bubu Ngadimunku Inc. and Queensland Council of Social Service)
- meetings and feedback from government champions.
What we heard

Stakeholders provided evidence and discussed their views on service delivery across many areas and issues. However, much of the feedback centred on key themes related to governance, funding, effectiveness of service delivery and reporting.

Funding

Stakeholders in communities are frustrated that expenditure information is not made available to them:

There appears to be an inherent inability or unwillingness by State and Commonwealth government agencies to provide a breakdown on their investment into each remote Indigenous community in Queensland. If this breakdown can’t be provided, then how can the effectiveness of government-funded programs be measured … Further, Indigenous councils are concerned about the amount of ‘leakage’ that occurs between the time funding is allocated to the time the service is delivered in community. (Local Government Association of Queensland, sub. 14, p. 5)

Funding is often insufficient to effectively deliver against service agreements:

What can one coordinator seriously do in his/her quest in addressing the over-representation of Indigenous offenders in prison? … It became impossible to attend court as per service agreement; build community networks; attend all meetings; write pre-sentence and cultural reports for the courts; organise meetings and manage the day to day administrative requirements of the CJG … What government fails to realise is that in 11 years, cost goes up, price of equipment goes up to fix or replace, insurance goes up. Everything has increased except our funding. (Barambah Local Justice Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation sub. 2, p. 5)

Funding is fragmented and inflexible:

... the current processes which require different sources of funding from different state and federal departments, often for the same clients, creates major issues associated with service provision, achievement of the best outcomes, administration and accountability. (Woorabinda Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation for Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Health sub. 5, p. 3)

Short-term funding undermines service effectiveness:

Funding opportunities are often designed to be short-term and/or non-recurrent, causing uncertainty about longevity … (in Palm Island) most services are fly-in fly-out, and are not able to build relationships with or gain a deep understanding of community needs, even though there are community members who are qualified or could be trained to fill those roles. (Amnesty International Australia sub. 13, p. 2)
Efficiency

Stakeholders said there is significant waste, with expenditures consumed by excessive administrative and compliance costs, inefficiencies, and sometimes duplication.

Where dual funding occurs across state and federal programs, it would produce far better outcomes on the ground if the state and federal governments invested up-front in working together to develop and streamline reporting requirements. The failure to do so has significant impacts on productivity and service delivery on the ground. (Torres Strait Island Regional Council sub. 12, p. 39)

... instead of alleviating Indigenous disadvantage, the shared responsibility has led to confusion, cost-shifting and waste in Indigenous program and service delivery. (The Centre for Independent Studies sub. 9, p. 4)

Service delivery in small Indigenous communities is now a very crowded space, and there is overservicing, duplication, waste and useless service provision in some areas. Even then, often services are so poorly targeted that there remains a high level of unmet need. (Cape York Institute sub. 26, p. 8)
Service duplication

Stakeholders said the lack of engagement with communities and coordination of services leads to duplication at all levels of service provision:

Often the first time remote communities are aware a new service has been funded is when the service provider contacts council looking for an office to rent, or when the service provider places an advertisement for personnel in the local paper. This lack of engagement with the council/community at the front end of the funding allocation process creates the ideal setting in which duplication can, and does, occur. For example, Mornington Shire Council has documented 10 separate organisations that have been funded to deliver the same four programs. (Local Government Association of Queensland sub. 14, p. 5)

A range of local and visiting agencies funded to deliver different levels of family support, mental health support and youth programs in one discrete community is not efficient and leads to duplication of effort and funding. (Woorabinda Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation for Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Health sub. 5, p. 3)

... without whole-of-stakeholder coordination, there is a real risk of funding duplication across government agencies and community project duplications amongst locally based organisations. (Torres Strait Regional Authority sub. 22, p. 2)

In Coen, for example, a small community of only around 400 people, there are two primary health care facilities less than 100 metres apart ... That is, there are two separate buildings, each separately staffed, delivering primary health services and using separate patient records in one small community. (Cape York Institute sub. 26, p. 9)
Evaluation

Inadequate reporting

While issues with evaluation make it difficult to measure outcomes, stakeholders said reporting focuses on the wrong things.

Many program or project evaluations only look at the output level and do not assess the level of benefit to the community, organisation or region.

There is little evidence of either measurement or evaluation of activities being undertaken by stakeholders in the region to determine whether these are having a real impact on the level of disadvantage being experienced or demonstrating a return on investment for funding bodies. (Torres Strait Regional Authority sub. 22, p.3)

Limited transparency

Many stakeholders said they see very little regular compliance reporting from service providers. Stakeholders thought governments were required to ask communities how they perceive service delivery.

What is required is 360 degrees’ evaluation. However, the reality is, government doesn’t want to be evaluated. (Stakeholder meeting, Cherbourg)

While there are some good examples of program evaluation in Queensland, much evaluation work remains secretive.

There is very little evidence available around program evaluation and reporting. When asked, service providers say that “the council or community are not entitled to access this information”—that it is “confidential” and that they are only required to provide this to their funding agency. Government agencies have also been reluctant in the past to provide information about funding levels or real-time data on program progress. (Local Government Association of Queensland sub. 14, p. 40)

Limits of evaluation/risk of misuse

Stakeholders expressed concerns that evaluations can be misused, even when they are rigorously conducted.

The answer to the problems that afflict our children, families and places will not be found even through the most conscientious application of the rhetoric about the need for more rigorous evaluation, application and adaption of ‘what works’ evidence or ‘best practice’ approaches. Indigenous communities are not laboratory environments, and the science of evaluation in such complex settings is not as precise as much of the rhetoric might suggest in such cases, even impact evaluations using the best quasi-experimental design leave themselves open to still be used on the basis of opinion, philosophy or politics. (Cape York Institute sub. 26, p. 23)

There is also a need to establish an Indigenous Ombudsman Office in Queensland to ensure there is an independent umpire to make sure targets and outcomes are met by all stakeholders delivering services in the region. (Torres Strait Regional Authority sub. 22, p. 3)
Specific areas of service delivery

Beyond the broader framework for service delivery, stakeholders raised key issues about land tenure and housing, as well as specific concerns on the delivery of human services.

Land tenure

A lack of property rights (or the resolution of tenure) causes issues for remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

We already have complex land tenure arrangements in the Torres Strait, and history has shown (as with the unresolved ‘Katter’ Land Holding Act leases) that insufficient processes leave a divisive legacy that can have significant impacts on community wellbeing.

Ultimately, without a certain and secure land administration framework, Queensland’s discrete Indigenous communities will continue to be reliant on grant funding and external service delivery. (Local Government Association of Queensland sub. 14, p. 35)

It is clear that the LAS is dysfunctional in Cape York ILGAs and other remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and it lags far behind the standard of LAS services that the rest of Queensland enjoys and depends on to successfully enable social and economic participation. (Cape York Land Council sub. 20, p. 3)

Housing

Stakeholders raised concerns government was not well positioned to manage tenancies in remote communities.

Homelessness and overcrowding in Yarrabah is at a catastrophic level. Council are only able to house 365 families, while a further 700 families remain homeless. (Yarrabah Council sub. 11, p. 23)

Call centre staff frequently lack awareness of the existence, location and culture of the Torres Strait. When this lack of cultural awareness is combined with the fact that English is the 2nd or 3rd language of many callers, it makes the system very difficult for community members to navigate.

Tenants frequently report having made multiple reports of maintenance requirements with no feedback or work completed. This in turn impacts on rental collection rates, as tenants cease paying rent with the belief that they are not required to pay rent until maintenance is completed. (Torres Strait Island Regional Council sub. 12, p. 29)

Education and training

NAPLAN results, attendance rates and Year 12 attainment are lower for Indigenous students in remote areas. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of getting education right.

Education provides a key pathway to economic opportunities, health and wellbeing and reduced crime. (CQUniversity sub. 9, p. 3)

... desire strong consideration to ensure cultural competency; improve staff broad knowledge around Aboriginal community functionality; need to improve working relationship with all tiers of education to support relevant educational structures that provide intense support to local community teachers and staff ... prepare staff about expectations, values, local trends and/or essential needs including the effect of the environmental disparity that has strong association with a systemic cycle of mental health problems associated with the Doomadgee Aboriginal community. (North West Queensland Indigenous Catholic Social Services sub. 23, p. 6)

Higher levels of special needs make learning difficult.

... there is a large area of service delivery neglect in responding to disabilities and special needs of First Nations people in remote and discrete communities ... this neglect has a direct impact on learning opportunities and outcomes, and it is a significant contributor to persistent and exceedingly poor outcomes in terms of crime, incarceration, suicide and education. (Cape York Institute sub. 26, p. 8)

Some noted successes, such as an industry-led VET partnership achieving almost full completion rates.

This program is an example of what can be achieved when all parties work collaboratively to lift the capacity of the workforce within remote Indigenous communities, and where locals on the ground in each community are at the heart of the decision-making process. (Local Government Association of Queensland sub. 14, p. 23)
Health and wellbeing

Stakeholders want more information about current health statuses, and the factors that influence them, to improve the health of communities.

Cross-sectoral communication, collaboration and planning is key to ensuring discrete Aboriginal communities have access to adequate levels of service, the most appropriate models of care and that efforts are not unnecessarily duplicated, nor result in a fragmented approach, which can hinder quality patient care pathways. (CheckUP sub. 10, p. 7)

They also indicated that services are not always meeting community need.

... suicide prevention funding which employed staff in Yarrabah was reallocated to Lifeline, and is now absorbed into their overarching funding. Previous local support has been replaced by the 1800 phone number which is insufficient and unacceptable for Yarrabah’s specific and highly acute needs. (Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council sub. 11, p. 10)

Community safety

Stakeholders indicated community safety efforts could be more preventive and better targeted.

The council, Mayor, Elders and Directors of the Justice Group have all told whoever will listen to please consider extra policing or police support officers from the community who know their own people to assist policing at night when most of the offending occurs and young people walk the streets petrol sniffing, smoking pot or vandalising properties.

When there was community policing in Cherbourg, the crime was low as noted by community elders and majority of the community. (Barambah Local Justice Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation sub. 2, p. 4)

And highlighted unmet needs.

Child safety, family violence and women’s support services are consistently mentioned as areas of underservicing in the TSIRC region.

The low levels of service experienced on the ground by our communities indicate a discrepancy between what organisations are funded to provide and what is delivered. (Torres Strait Island Regional Council sub. 12, p. 26)
Decision-making and accountability

Many stakeholders indicated a strong desire for a major shift towards community decision-making and accountability.

A key aspiration of the region and its leadership is to work towards achieving regional governance to enable local/regional control and management of all government and non-government services and programmes being delivered in the region. (Torres Strait Regional Authority sub. 22, p. 2)

Governments persist with fly-in, fly-out models of service delivery and centralised decision-making. It is time for this entrenched model to shift ... TSIRC recommends that the Queensland Government establish a whole-of-government approach that gives back decision-making, funds management, service planning and delivery, to the greatest degree possible, the local TSIRC region. (Torres Strait Island Regional Council sub. 12, p. 8 and p. 11)

The aspiration of Yarrabah is to enable the community and individuals to choose and coordinate their own path to empowerment and development. (CQUniversity sub. 7, p. 3)

Woorabinda community members need to be considered best-placed to drive change in their community. This requires a bottom-up approach to accommodate not only meaningful engagement but more importantly, community ownership. Local decision-making, program design, the ability of community to participate in problem-solving, and respect and understanding for local cultural constraints are critical aspects of the process. (The Woorabinda Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation for Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Health sub. 5, p. 2)

Consultation in the past has been tokenistic and negotiations need to occur for equal relationships to develop. (Barambah Local Justice Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation sub. 2, p. 4)

Closing the Gap on Indigenous disadvantage requires a paradigm shift in the approach of government to service delivery in remote Indigenous communities ... For too long, Indigenous communities have been told what is best for them. This disempowers and alienates communities. It is not the basis for a mutually respectful relationship. (Local Government Association of Queensland sub. 14, p. 19)

Conclusion

The consultation program canvassed a wide range of issues but found many common themes. There was a general agreement among all stakeholders that the service delivery system is not meeting expectations and there is an opportunity to improve. Feedback focused on how to better design and deliver services and empower communities to achieve better outcomes.
Next steps

The Queensland Productivity Commission is committed to adequate and appropriate consultation especially with Queensland’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. To this end, the Commission has released a draft report for consultation to allow stakeholders to view the materials collected and to review the draft recommendations, ensuring the validity of the information provided in the report.

For further information on consultation sessions or making a submission visit www.qpc.qld.gov.au

A final report will be submitted to the Queensland Government in December 2017.