

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

Inquiry into Welfare Reform and Reinstatement of the Racial Discrimination Act

Canberra Hearing, Thursday 4 February 2010

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Question No: WR7a

Topic: Cape York welfare reforms

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Senator Furner asked:

Are you able to inform us what the Cape York welfare reform trial is delivering at this point in time?

Answer:

On 21 December 2007, the Australian and Queensland governments agreed to the welfare reform trials in four Cape York communities – Aurukun, Hope Vale, Mossman Gorge and Coen. The reforms commenced in the Cape York on 1 July 2008 and conclude on 31 December 2011.

In the first 18 months, there is early evidence of positive trends emerging in the Cape York Welfare Reform communities with:

- improvements in school attendance between Term 3 2008 and Term 3 2009, with increases at Aurukun (21.5 percentage points), Coen (5.5 percentage points) and Mossman Gorge (2.2 percentage points);
- a calmer environment in Aurukun, evidenced by a significant drop from the previous year in the annual rates of reported offences against the person, from 141.9 to 85.3 per 1000 people;
- strong leadership by local commissioners in setting high standards of concern and responsibility in the communities;
- community members voluntarily seeking support from services established under the reforms including the wellbeing centres, school attendance case managers and family income management services;
- 40 real jobs being created as a result of CDEP reform; and
- establishment of Student Education Trusts for 318 children which enable parents and carers to save for their children's education and development
 - families have already saved in excess of \$367,000 to the Trusts.

Family Responsibilities Commission

A centrepiece of the trial is the Family Responsibilities Commission (FRC) which commenced operation on 1 July 2008. Between 1 July 2008 and 30 September 2009, the FRC:

- received 2569 agency notifications (974 were school attendance notices, 1148 Magistrates Courts notifications, 434 Child Safety notifications and 13 housing tenancy notifications); and
- held 1317 conferences in response to these notices, (622 were held in Aurukun, 80 in Coen, 467 in Hope Vale and 148 in Mossman Gorge).