



Speech by


**Andrew Cripps**

**MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK**

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## **FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES COMMISSION AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (4.02 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Family Responsibilities Commission and Other Acts Amendment Bill. I intend to confine my remarks to those provisions of the bill relating to the amendments concerning the Family Responsibilities Commission Act. The objective of the bill in this regard is to make the necessary amendments to that act to allow the Cape York Welfare Reform trial and the operations of the Family Responsibilities Commission to be extended by 12 months.

The explanatory notes accompanying the bill state that this will provide continued support for the restoration of socially responsible standards of behaviour and local authority in the communities involved in the trial and improve the wellbeing of those communities. The trial commenced in July 2008 under a tripartite agreement between the Australian government, the Queensland government and the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership.

The explanatory notes accompanying the bill also state that the trial aims to build stronger and more resilient communities, enable children to achieve their full potential, support engagement in the real economy and encourage individuals and families from social housing into homeownership. The trial has been operating in Aurukun, Hope Vale, Coen and Mossman Gorge.

I agree with the Minister for Disability Services, Mental Health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships when he said in his speech introducing the bill that embedding changes and building stronger and more resilient communities requires generational change and long-term commitment. I make the observation that this is true of all communities, not just Indigenous communities. The minister's observation is particularly true when one considers the dimension that most significantly influences the delivery of this trial from an institutional perspective—once again identified by the minister in his introductory speech—being the challenges of service delivery in remote areas of Queensland.

I did hold the shadow portfolio for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander economic development for a short period earlier in this parliamentary term and I have also taken an ongoing interest in issues pertaining to Indigenous Queenslanders, particularly as they relate to the use of land for the purpose of enhancing the material and social circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I took an interest in the work of the Family Responsibilities Commission and I would like to support the observations of the current shadow minister, the member for Moggill, who complimented the efforts of Commissioner Glasgow as someone who is well informed about the issues confronting Indigenous Queenslanders and who has a genuine concern for the people he has responsibility for in that position.

The shadow minister observed that the ongoing quarterly reports and annual report of the Family Responsibilities Commission outline the magnitude of the challenge in some of these isolated Indigenous communities. The member for Moggill noted that the most recent report from 2010 indicated that for the roughly 2,200 people who are resident in the four communities involved in the trial there were 4,364

notifications to the commission, which is close to two notifications for each resident. Of those, around 3,000 notifications related to residents of those communities and incidents that occurred in those communities.

As the member for Moggill observed, the LNP supported the establishment of the Family Responsibilities Commission in 2008. During the debate on the Family Responsibilities Commission Bill in March that year, I noted that the Cape York institute had developed a set of proposed welfare reforms that were intended to act as the policy tool to address the significant economic and social disadvantage that plagued Queensland's Indigenous communities.

The rationale for the trial was that there was an urgent need to restore what were described as social norms and local authority and to change behaviours in respect of chronic levels of welfare dependency, social dysfunction and economic exclusion that were all-pervading in many Indigenous communities. The bill in 2008 established the commission as the mechanism for the welfare reform trial to attempt to support the rebuilding of social norms and change behaviours through attaching reciprocity to welfare and other government payments.

Certainly, the Queensland government, with the support of the opposition at the time, as part of the tripartite agreement with the Australian government and the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership made value judgements about what constituted those social norms and what behaviours needed to be changed. I think sound and relevant tests were nominated for the welfare reciprocity arrangements to be triggered. They included: a child of an individual either not being enrolled or not meeting designated school attendance requirements; an individual being involved in a matter involving the department of child safety in relation to the alleged harm or risk of harm of a child; the individual being convicted of an offence in the Magistrates Court; and the individual as a tenant breaching a social housing tenancy agreement.

The 2008 bill established the trial that focused on Indigenous communities in Cape York, but it also mooted a possible application on a wider scale in the future. I made the observation during the debate on the 2008 bill that the acute problems and challenges with respect to social norms and community standards are arguably more visible or perhaps most often reported on in Indigenous communities, but they are present and their impact is equally insidious in all Queensland communities, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

The trial is a tripartite agreement between the Cape York institute, the state and the Commonwealth. The trigger mechanisms involve welfare payments to individuals in trial communities received from the Commonwealth. I appreciate that the extension of this trial has been motivated by the need to establish exactly how robust and effective this mechanism is.

During the debate on the 2008 bill, I observed that once the trial was bedded down and we could determine the appropriateness of the structure of the Family Responsibilities Commission to deliver the social welfare reform, it ought to be rolled out for all Queenslanders, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The value judgements that the Commonwealth government and the state government made in conjunction with the Cape York institute about what were desirable social norms and what unacceptable behaviours needed to change in Indigenous communities would surely be appropriately applied to welfare payments to the recipients of Commonwealth welfare payments in non-Indigenous communities. The qualifier is, of course, that the extension of this trial in Aurukun, Hope Vale, Coen and Mossman Gorge through the Family Responsibilities Commission has been deemed to be necessary in part because we are still determining the robustness and the effectiveness of this mechanism to achieve its objective. The shadow minister, the member for Moggill, pointed out that the two full years of the trial has cost approximately \$16 million to establish the commission and deal with about 4,300 notifications. I wish the trial well. I wish the communities engaged in the trial and the good people in them well. The LNP supports the objectives of the trial and supports the bill.