



25 August 2025

OUR REF: #7716899

Commission of Inquiry into Child Safety Systems in Queensland
GPO Box 783
BRISBANE QLD 4000
Via email: info@childsafetyinquiry.qld.gov.au

Dear Commissioner

Cairns Regional Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Commission of Inquiry into Child Safety Systems in Queensland. While statutory responsibility for child protection lies with the Queensland Government, Local Government plays a crucial role in creating environments that support child safety, wellbeing, and resilience.

As a growing and diverse regional centre with a population of approximately 170,000, including large Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally diverse communities, Cairns faces unique social and economic challenges. These include above-average levels of disadvantage, domestic and family violence, climate-related disruptions, and service pressures from transient populations. These factors place additional strain on families and local support systems.

From Council's perspective, the current Child Safety system is characterised by:

- Fragmented pathways and poor coordination between agencies and services.
- Insufficient culturally safe, community-led responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.
- A lack of focus on addressing causality, prevention and early intervention.
- Service shortages in remote areas, resulting in regional city's child safety systems servicing a significantly larger geographic region.
- Lack of oversight and over-dependency on placing children in residential care facilities.

Despite limited statutory responsibilities, Council actively contributes to child safety outcomes through the provision of safe community infrastructure, support and delivery of family and youth development programs, partnerships with the community services sector, and advocacy on systemic issues.

Community safety is a priority for Council and the intersection between child protection and youth justice systems is of particular concern. National data reveals a strong correlation between early exposure to harm and contact with child safety and later involvement in the youth justice system (AIHW 2025). Cairns has been identified as a hotspot for serious repeat youth offenders, underscoring the urgency of more integrated, proactive responses to vulnerable families and children in contact with the child safety system.

Key Recommendations:

1. Strengthen Early Intervention and Prevention

- Invest in locally delivered parenting, early years, and youth programs.
- Improve access to early diagnosis and treatment services, including for FASD and other disabilities and health conditions prevalent among children in contact with the child safety system.
- Commit to long-term funding models and reduce short-term, fragmented initiatives.

2. Improve Regional and Remote Service Access

- Increase the number of Child Safety Officers in remote areas.
- Invest in staff recruitment and development with a focus on a sustainable workforce and retention of experienced practitioners
- Increase alternative out-of-home care options that are responsive to the needs of a wider range of children and young people.
- Improved consultation with the community and Council regarding the proposed location of alternative out-of-home care options.
- Enhance telehealth and mobile outreach services.

3. Enhance Local Integration and Governance

- Establish formal place-based child safety networks with all key agencies and service stakeholders, including First Nations organisations.
- Implement shared systems for case coordination and information-sharing.
- Increase accountability and transparency in residential care settings.

4. Embed Cultural Safety

- Invest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led child and family services.
- Prioritise recruitment and retention of First Nations child safety practitioners

Cairns Regional Council is committed to working collaboratively with the Queensland Government to build a more responsive, integrated, and culturally safe child safety system. Council urges the Commission to ensure regional voices are central to reform, and to prioritise prevention, early intervention, and cross-sector collaboration as the foundation for long-term child and community wellbeing.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission.

Yours sincerely,



Cr Amy Eden
Mayor