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**CHILD SAFETY COMMISSION OF INQUIRY**

**STATE OF QUEENSLAND**

**PROACTIVE STATEMENT NO. 10**

**STATEMENT OF LEE STORCK**

I, **Lee Storck**, of care of Crown Law, Level 11, 50 Ann Street, Brisbane, Principal Contract Officer, Investment, Planning and Partnerships, Far North Queensland, Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety (the Department) in the State of Queensland state as follows:

1. My qualifications include a Bachelor of Psychology with Honours (class I) degree conferred in 1998 from James Cook University.
2. I am a Principal Contract Officer for the Investment, Planning and Partnerships (IPP) team with the Department in the Far North Queensland Region and have been employed by the Department since 2015. During this time I have also held various team leader and acting manager roles mostly in the disability portfolio and contract management teams.
3. As a Principal Contract Officer, I oversee a team of five staff inclusive of one senior contract officer and four contract officers. Our team is responsible for managing the procurement and contract management lifecycle for the Far North Queensland region, as well as regional licensing processes in the Far North Queensland region. This includes developing and negotiating contracts, compliance monitoring, addressing contractual and licensing non-compliances with suppliers and licensed organisations and ensuring adherence to legislation, contracts, policies, and procedures.
4. Although I am not directly responsible for the development of departmental policies, my role involves contributing to the design and implementation of processes and procedures to support contract-related tasks in the Far North Queensland Region.

**ROLE**

5. IPP teams exist in each region. They oversee the day-to-day contract management for outsourced service delivery by maintaining provider relationships, engaging with the broader service system, and monitoring performance within the region. The teams also undertake routine monitoring and inspection of licensed care services in line with departmental licensing processes.
6. A key aspect of my role as Principal Contract Officer is building working relationships with service providers across the Far North Queensland region to support the delivery of programs and services. Relationship based commissioning is an important approach in the procurement of social services.
7. The IPP teams supports organisations to build their organisational and service delivery capacity. This includes supporting Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO), by using a development approach, providing practical supports and guidance.
8. In addition to relationship management, I monitor and evaluate service provider performance, ensuring compliance with contractual and legislative requirements, and provide guidance to service providers on meeting reporting and quality standards. This includes endorsing quarterly performance reports and authorising payments to organisations.
9. I also provide direction to contract management staff in relation to monitoring and undertaking inspection of care services delivered in the Far North Queensland region by licensed organisations and contribute to the development and maintenance of the licensing process.
10. Sections 145, 146 and 147 of the *Child Protection Act 1999* (the CP Act) contain provisions and requirements relevant to the inspection of licensed care services.
11. Section 156 of the CP Act allows the Chief Executive to delegate their powers under the CP Act to an appropriately qualified officer or employee of the Department.
12. The Director-General has delegated the powers, authorities, functions and duties imposed on the Director-General under section 145, 146 and 147 to Contract Officers, which includes allowing them to conduct licensing inspections.
13. I work closely with a range of teams within the Department, including the regional Placement Services Unit, Child Safety Licensing and the Department's centrally based Investment and Commissioning (Child and Family) branch to ensure services are delivered in line with program intent, service specifications and legislation.
14. I contribute to regional planning and investment strategies by identifying service delivery gaps and supporting the development of targeted solutions.

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## REGIONAL CONTEXT

15. Commissioning and delivering services in the Far North Queensland region involves working in thin markets, managing the impact of significant distances and remote locations, and addressing workforce attraction and retention challenges.
16. Contract management in this context includes monitoring service provider performance and compliance, while supporting providers to navigate departmental processes and the logistical challenges due to limited resources and geographic isolation.
17. Services are delivered to a large number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by both mainstream service providers and ACCOs, which requires a culturally appropriate approach informed by First Nations staff.

## REGIONAL COMMISSIONING AND INVESTMENT PLANNING

18. Departmental regional offices develop annual investment plans to guide procurement, contract management, market and regional practice activities that align with departmental objectives and regional needs.
19. The 2024-2025 Regional Commissioning and Investment Plan for Far North Queensland (the Investment Plan) is monitored by senior regional staff through Out of Home Care strategic meetings held in the region every four to six weeks. These meetings monitor and manage Family-Based and Non-Family Based service delivery investment; and Quarterly Investment meetings to monitor all other funded service delivery in the region.
20. The Investment Plan objectives and strategies aim to improve service delivery across the following areas:
  - a) Family based care;
  - b) Non-Family based care;
  - c) Youth and Family support;
  - d) ACCOs;
  - e) Delegated Authority; and
  - f) Governance and sector stewardship.
21. The Investment Plan includes strategies to:
  - a) increase the capacity of Family-Based care to respond to demand (increase the number of family based care placements for children);

  
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- b) establish and support the commencement of a family based placement service delivered by an ACCO in Cape York and Torres Strait;
  - c) establish and procure models of Non-Family based care appropriate to demand;
  - d) transition youth support services to better align with the needs of First Nations young people;
  - e) enhance and geographically realign Family Wellbeing Services and Family Participation Programs through a place-based approach to better respond to family needs;
  - f) increase the market and supply of ACCOs;
  - g) establish and expand Delegated Authority;
  - h) proactively engage and collaborate with the funded sector to understand their capabilities, challenges and opportunities, while identifying emerging needs or trends in the market and adapting funding strategies.
22. A planning session is scheduled for 30 September 2025 with senior regional staff to develop the 2025-2026 Investment Plan. The session will review the achievements and challenges of the 2024-25 financial year, consider the Department's future strategic priorities following the change of government in 2024, and incorporate advice from departmental governance and decision-making groups.
23. Whilst a formal review is yet to occur, in discussions with the Acting Manager of the Far North Queensland IPP team, Matthew Marshall, we consider the following are highlights from the 2024-25 plan:
- a) A number of Family Based Care contracts were varied to provide flexible brokerage funding, increased number of placements and designation of some remote placements.
  - b) A fee for service arrangement commenced with an ACCO to support kinship finding and increase the involvement of First Nations suppliers, aligning with the new Family-Based service specifications.
  - c) The Kin Placement Team have been focusing on children new to care and directing referrals to Foster/Kinship care agencies with vacancies creating a referral pipeline.
  - d) An achievement in Non-Family Based Care is the maintenance of a regional due diligence process (referred to as the preferred supplier process) to manage risk, limit the number of unlicensed providers and conduct six monthly checks of unlicensed providers.
  - e) The Far North Queensland region has progressed an in-scope of licensing assessment for a service provider who has since commenced a Human Services

  
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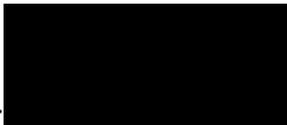
  
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Quality Framework (HSQF) accreditation process. Achieving this quality accreditation is an essential step of being invited to apply for an Organisational Level Licence.

- f) The Far North Queensland region has also established and enhanced Family Wellbeing and Family Participation Programs through both open tender and direct negotiations. A new Family Wellbeing service has been established in Mossman, a permanent tender awarded for Lockhart River and an expanded catchment finalised for Cassowary Coast. A new service - Indigenous Youth and Family Worker has commenced in Mareeba. Direct negotiations with four existing Family Wellbeing providers resulted in the recommissioning of Family Participation Programs to place based models for Yarrabah, Cassowary Coast, Tablelands and the Northern Peninsula Area. These services will commence from 1 September 2025.
- g) The establishment of two Delegated Authority services in Torres Strait and Cape York has occurred with both now commencing delegations. A further two Delegated Authority services have been procured in Cairns and Cassowary Coast. These are both in the establishment phase.
- h) Market scoping of ACCOs and Indigenous Businesses has also occurred. This involved engaging with the market and identifying suitable providers in the region. This had resulted in the development of a database of interested parties and an improved understanding of the First Nations suppliers in the region.

24. Challenges for Family Based Care have included the unsuccessful procurement process for a Cape Torres Foster and Kinship service that resulted in no recommended supplier. This has proven to be a difficult area to provide services given the limited number of suppliers, geographically diverse locations, relatively small numbers of carers and high cost. Funding based solely on placement numbers would make place-based services unviable. Cape York and Torres Strait consists of unique communities. Some service providers may be unwilling to deliver services outside their specific place-based community. The Far North Queensland regional office will consider options to deliver services that best meets unique challenges of the catchment when developing the 2025-2026 Investment Plan.

25. A general challenge for the region is that contract management and procurement are time consuming and not agile to emerging regional needs. Open market procurement processes involve multiple stages with documentation requiring several levels of review and endorsement. There is a clear separation of roles regarding procurement decision making which is aimed at probity and the accountability of public funds. Contract renewals commence ten months prior to end of contract due to the time taken to make recommendations and receive approvals. This means that emergent needs cannot easily be accommodated in routine contract renewals. This is compounded by services having difficulty achieving contracted targets due to their inability to attract and retain skilled staff long term, resulting in unspent funds being returned to the Department. There has not been a review or increase in investment of

  
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early intervention services for some time, resulting in unmet need with most services holding waiting lists.

I make this statement of my own free will believing its contents to be true and correct.

Dated this 3<sup>rd</sup> day of September 2025.

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