

**Queensland Corrective Services Submission to the  
CRIME AND MISCONDUCT COMMISSION INQUIRY  
*POLICING IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES***

**What is the relationship between the police and people in remote communities?**

Queensland police, Corrective Services and justice staff share similar experiences in remote communities when working with offenders as they progress through the criminal justice system. It is clear that a considerable amount of work has been done in relation to building better relations between the police and the community. It is suggested that further consultation and dialogue with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community about the role of police and the role of the community in policing may further improve this relationship.

The presence of alcohol and substance abuse, high rates of domestic and family violence, continued over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the criminal justice system and unemployment are also issues which affect how police are perceived by the Indigenous community.

One issue that faces many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is that junior government employees (including junior police officers) are employed in remote communities for short periods. It can be difficult to build trust and respect from the community and vice versa, when the local Council, community justice group and others are unfamiliar with the local government employees including police.

Queensland Corrective Services has seen that in some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities the relationship between the police and the community has been improved by the introduction of a number of strategies that Corrective Services also employs. These strategies include matching individual police officers with the more remote and isolated communities, more appropriate cultural appreciation training and the willingness of officers to build better relationships with the local community, including meeting with the local Council, community justice groups and others within the community.

Queensland Corrective Services is of the view that the Council can take a lead role in ensuring that police and corrective services staff are seen as part of their community and not just a part of the justice system.

**What changes should be made to improve the delivery of policing services to the remote Indigenous communities.**

Queensland Corrective Services recognises that the delivery of law and justice in Indigenous communities cannot be the sole responsibility of the Queensland Police Service. Queensland Corrective Services aims to be an effective partner in the current justice system, and has commenced a strategy to improve the quality and effectiveness of service delivery in remote Indigenous communities. In 2006-07 QCS opened new Probation and Parole offices in the communities of Doomadgee, Mornington Island, Normanton and Thursday Island. Like police services, the effectiveness of Queensland Corrective Services' service delivery in these communities is influenced by the availability and effectiveness of other related law and justice and human services.

Success for any government agency in the delivery of services to remote communities means developing a partnership with the community. For any government agency employing persons who are suitable to work in remote areas, it is important that those persons have a genuine commitment to work in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and it is equally important that support is provided to these government officers to recognise their often difficult and challenging work.

The role of Community Police within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is complicated by their existing relationships and responsibilities within the community.

The Government recently endorsed a preferred model for policing in all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The model involves the replacement of Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Police (QATSIP's) and Community Police with state police officers and Indigenous Police Liaison Officers in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Queensland Corrective Services supports this model.

**How can the community help the police to deliver policing services to the community?**

There are a range of local initiatives that are already in place across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including community justice groups, future directions groups, consultative groups, men's groups and others which seek to address a broad range of justice issues.

Whilst these groups have had varying levels of success in addressing local justice issues and working with the police, many could improve their outcomes with further training, increased resources, and providing them with clear policy or direction in relation to their core responsibilities.

In QCS' experience, many groups suffer due to responsibility for providing support and guidance falling to the same very small group of Elders, with little involvement of the middle aged and younger people in the community.

For many communities, succession planning will be an issue as there do not appear to be community members who are ready and willing to take over the vital function of Elders within the community. Increased human and financial capital would improve the ability of these groups to provide even a basic level of services to their communities.

**What is the most culturally appropriate, timely and effective way to resolve complaints against police by Indigenous community members?**

It is acknowledged that the CMC and others have done much to publicise the work of the Commission however this should be an ongoing process including regular visits to the remote and isolated communities and updates to current practices concerning the complaints process.

It is noted the Queensland Ombudsman provides a range of electronic and written resources including information regarding making a complaint on the Queensland Ombudsman website, with links for those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who wish to make a complaint about a public agency.

It is proposed that the Queensland Ombudsman undertake further work in relation to resources for responding to complaints from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

**Does the current and planned level of surveillance and monitoring of people in detention provide a safe and accountable custody environment?**

The Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) makes 339 recommendations aimed at reducing the number of Aboriginal deaths in custody. Queensland Corrective Services, like the Queensland Police Service, has implemented a number of strategies to respond to the RCIADIC recommendations, including the installation of surveillance and monitoring equipment in prison cells and the development of particular procedures for those prisoners deemed to be at risk of self harm.

Queensland Corrective Services also works with other service providers to provide cultural and spiritual advice and assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners, including as part of the cell-visitors service.

It has been found that these services have had a positive effect on the treatment and detention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners and has assisted in reducing the number of Indigenous deaths in custody.

**What are the issues in regard to police detention in the Torres Strait Islands, given that there is only one watch-house in the Torres Strait?**

The current watch-house in arrangements the Torres Strait limits the ability of police to transport prisoners within the Torres Strait region.

The Torres Strait covers an area from the tip of mainland Australia to New Guinea, an area of some 42,000 square kilometres and is currently serviced by the use of the Police Air Wing and by police watercraft.

The difficulties faced by Queensland Police are similar in some respects to those faced by Queensland Corrective Services and other agencies, in providing services to small Island communities over such a large area.

Recent work has focused on developing stronger relationships between agencies, including developing justice responses on the outer islands that aim to reduce or prevent the incidence of crime within the community.

## **What can be done to keep people out of custody?**

Queensland Corrective Services currently works with a number of other agencies, including the Queensland Police Service, in relation to the development and implementation of initiatives, including the Queensland Indigenous Alcohol Diversion Program and Murri Courts that respond to the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Agreement commitment to reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples incarcerated in the Queensland criminal justice system.

Queensland Corrective Services has implemented the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Strategy which is aimed at establishing a sustainable probation and parole presence in rural and remote Indigenous communities and to reduce the over-representation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system.

As part of this new approach to the delivery of services within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities Queensland Corrective Services established new Probation and Parole offices in the Aboriginal communities of Doomadgee, Mornington Island and Normanton during 2006.

QCS will be evaluating this Strategy over the next three years with a view to identifying implementation issues that may need to be considered when expanding Probation and Parole offices into other centres, to identify strategies that will improve the effectiveness of the current offices. Importantly, it is proposed to evaluate whether the investment in the Strategy has led to social and economic benefits through diverting offenders from prison and assisting to make communities safer by reducing re-offending.