

# Yarrabah highlights report

2002–2010



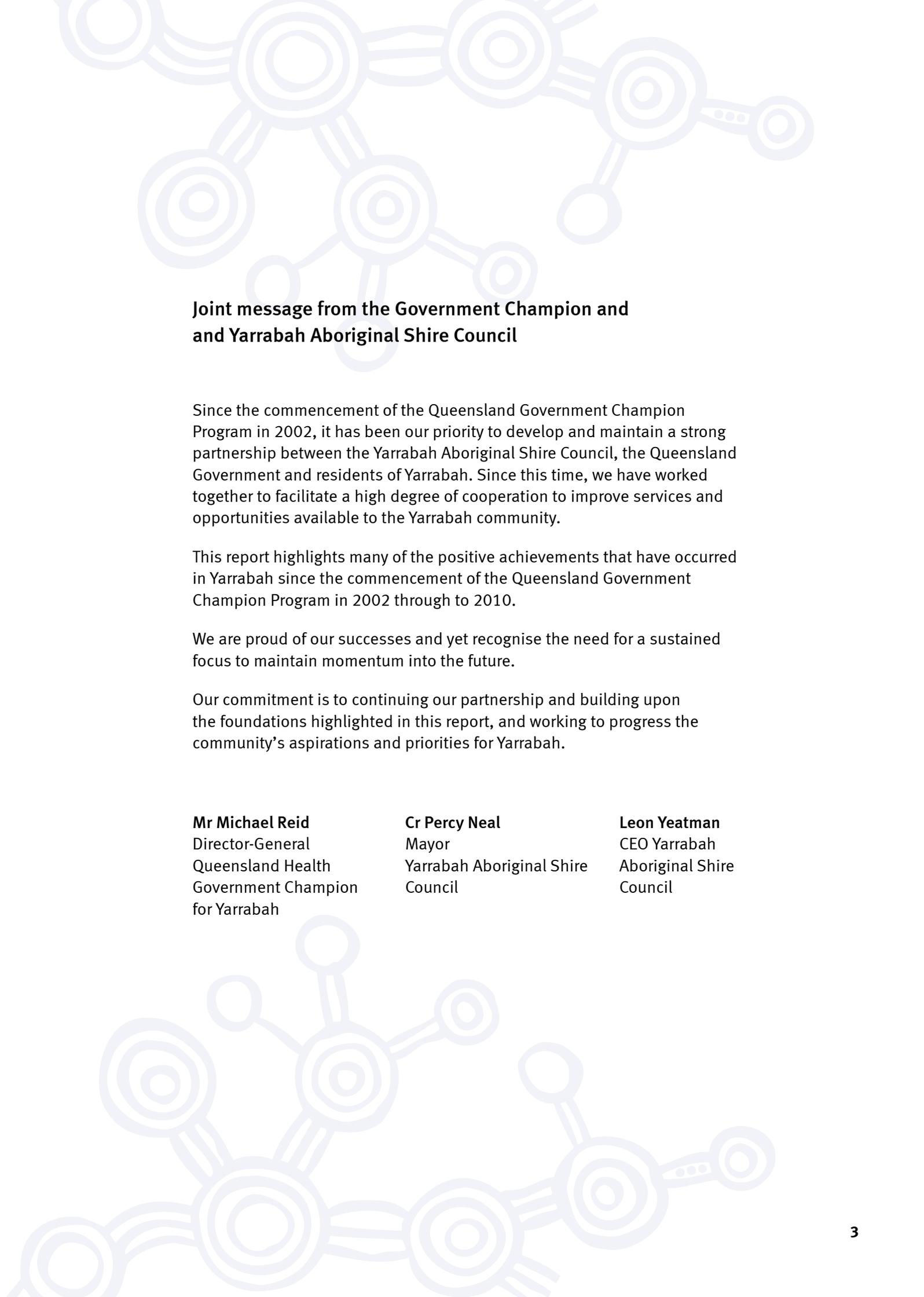
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Queensland  
Government

# Continuing our partnerships





## **Joint message from the Government Champion and and Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council**

Since the commencement of the Queensland Government Champion Program in 2002, it has been our priority to develop and maintain a strong partnership between the Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council, the Queensland Government and residents of Yarrabah. Since this time, we have worked together to facilitate a high degree of cooperation to improve services and opportunities available to the Yarrabah community.

This report highlights many of the positive achievements that have occurred in Yarrabah since the commencement of the Queensland Government Champion Program in 2002 through to 2010.

We are proud of our successes and yet recognise the need for a sustained focus to maintain momentum into the future.

Our commitment is to continuing our partnership and building upon the foundations highlighted in this report, and working to progress the community's aspirations and priorities for Yarrabah.

**Mr Michael Reid**  
Director-General  
Queensland Health  
Government Champion  
for Yarrabah

**Cr Percy Neal**  
Mayor  
Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire  
Council

**Leon Yeatman**  
CEO Yarrabah  
Aboriginal Shire  
Council

# Community profile

**Yarrabah is a small town with a population of approximately 3000 people, located 37 kilometres south east of Cairns.**

Originally inhabited by the Gungganyji people, other regional groups (particularly Yidinji) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were removed to a mission established in Yarrabah from 1892. In the late 1960s the missions were abolished and the first **Yarrabah Community Council** established. In 1986, the council became self-governing when it received its Deed of Grant in Trust (DOGIT) land tenure status.

Today, the **Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council** (YASC) is committed to raising living standards in Yarrabah and is responsible for major projects including housing, community buildings, roads, training, licenses and permits.

**Yarrabah has a young population**, with approximately 56 per cent of the total population aged 24 years or younger.

Services available to the community include:

- a school for prep to year 10 students
- a primary health care service
- an aged care facility
- a library
- a museum
- a local store.



# Background

The **Queensland Government Champion Program** was developed as a part of the Queensland Government's response to the **Meeting Challenges, Making Choices** policy developed in 2002.

The Queensland Government Champion Program appoints a Queensland Government Champion to each of the 19 discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Shires/communities across Queensland. Since the Program commenced in 2002, the Directors-General of Queensland Health have taken on the role of Queensland Government Champion for Yarrabah. In 2009, Michael Reid was appointed Director-General of Queensland Health and, at the same time, agreed to take on the role of Queensland Government Champion for Yarrabah.

Through the use of negotiation tables and engagement activities, he has worked alongside YASC and Yarrabah residents to identify priorities and associated responsibilities to provide effective, efficient and integrated solutions for the Yarrabah community, in the form of:

- improved health and wellbeing
- activities and education for youth
- better community safety
- provision of housing and infrastructure
- continued economic development.

In 2011 and onwards the Queensland Government Champion Program, in association with YASC and Yarrabah residents, will continue building on these foundations to enable the Yarrabah community to realise its aspirations.



# Health and wellbeing



The residents of Yarrabah want to be better informed on how to live longer, healthier lives, have better lifestyles, and how to prevent ill health, taking a holistic approach to health. By working together and focusing on health promotion, prevention and early intervention, Yarrabah is developing a healthier and more resilient community.

On 21 October 2010 the new **Sister Muriel Stanley Building** opened its doors. The **Gurriny Yealamucka Primary Health Care Service**, a partnership between Gurriny Yealamucka Health Service Aboriginal Corporation, Queensland Health, and the Queensland Ambulance Service, operates out of this purpose-built facility to improve the delivery of integrated health services for the Yarrabah community.

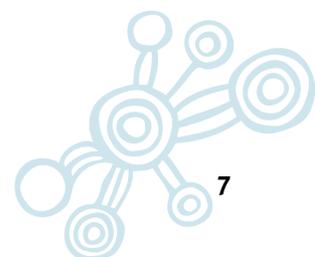
The opening of the Gurriny Yealamucka Primary Health Care Service marks the start of a process of gearing services for a potential transition (pending government approval) of Queensland Health's primary health care services toward greater community control. This is a key strategy towards closing the gap in health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Yarrabah. The service includes multi-purpose rooms available for use by the community, making it an integral part of the community that will potentially encourage greater local involvement in the planning, development, delivery and access to health services.

The **Gindaja Treatment and Healing Centre** is a 19-bed hostel catering for both men and women with drug and alcohol-related problems. The centre offers a wide range of ongoing support and care programs utilising a holistic approach to the treatment and recovery of individuals. Gindaja is a community controlled organisation, receiving funding from the Department of Health and Ageing, Aboriginal Hostels Limited, and Queensland Health, under the **Queensland Indigenous Alcohol Diversion Program**.

On 17-19 May 2010, a **Campaign Against Cannabis** was held in Yarrabah, jointly sponsored by Gindaja and Queensland Health. Participants received information on health, drugs and safety whilst enjoying the opportunity to ride in a restored army tank nicknamed The Big Green Destroyer. The day was popular, with 450 children and 120 adults participating in the three day event. The campaign provided the community with information on the implications of cannabis use and tools to address any problems that may arise from continued use.

The passion for sport in Yarrabah provides key opportunities to reinforce positive messages to the community through community events and activities. A number of local activities have included sporting events and visits to the community by popular sporting personalities. In December 2008, the former Department of Local Government, Sport and Recreation, organised for Australia's Olympic swimming coach and mentor, Lawrie Lawrence, and former NRL players, Steve Renouf and Rod Jensen, to visit Yarrabah to promote **pool safety messages** and encourage children and parents to participate in **daily physical activity**.

Lawrie Lawrence visited Yarrabah again in March 2010 for an event supporting the Queensland Government **Deadly Sports Program**. He was accompanied by some of Queensland's top sports identities, including Australian netballer Laura Geitz, former North Queensland Cowboys player Rod Jensen, former Australian softball representatives Kelly McKellar and Tanya Harding, and former Australian Indigenous cricketer Barry Weare. Around 100 local primary school students actively participated in the event which **promoted healthy and active lifestyles** for local children and youth through a series of coaching clinics, training sessions and friendly competition.



# Education



We are committed to providing Yarrabah residents with access to the best possible education and training opportunities now and into the future. With approximately 470 full-time students enrolled at Yarrabah State School across three campuses (pre-prep, primary and secondary to year 10) many initiatives focus on improving enrolment and attendance, and engaging children and young people in education in Yarrabah. Further initiatives have been implemented to encourage ongoing education into adulthood.



A **pre-prep to prep transition program**, aimed at successfully transitioning pre-prep students to prep at the primary campus, has been initiated at Yarrabah State School to support continued engagement in early years education programs. The program begins with a visit by pre-prep students to the primary campus to participate in National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee Week (NAIDOC Week) celebrations, followed by two visits to the prep unit during the term. Incorporated into the **Families as First Teachers Program**, the students are integrated into the prep unit in term four, one day a week. While teachers deliver the program, parents and families are involved to assist in the successful transitioning of the pre-prep students and help ensure success. Similarly, under the **Senior Secondary Transition Program**, Yarrabah State School has partnered with Gordonvale State School to assist students transitioning from year 10 at Yarrabah State School to senior high school at other schools outside the community.

In 2010 Yarrabah State School commenced its community engagement and attendance strategy, **Our Children, Our Community, Our Future**. With funding from the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, two community engagement officers have been appointed to support this initiative in collaboration with relevant agencies

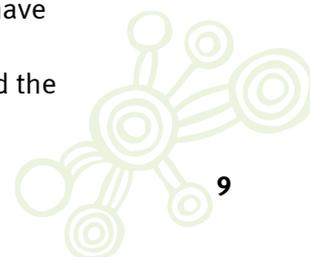
An education action research project, **Making a difference: promoting sustainable change in education, training and employment in Yarrabah**, has been developed through a partnership between James Cook University, YASC, Yarrabah Justice Group, Department of Education and Training, Department of Communities and the Australian Government. The project aimed to support whole-of-community interventions and strategic actions including:

- parental and community school partnerships to address local issues
- facilitating enrolment and attendance of children in a school
- full participation and engagement of children
- parents/carers and the community in the education system
- opportunities for pathways into further education, training and employment,
- engagement with 'at risk' families.

In October 2009 the Government Champion, together with the Director-General of the Department of Education and Training and YASC, convened a **Yarrabah education and training forum**. A number of initiatives were identified at the forum to further engage the community's youth in education. A Yarrabah Education and Training Strategy, developed following the education forum, outlines a number of initiatives aimed at improving school attendance and educational outcomes in the community.

In 2010 the **Hands on Learning Program** was trialled at the Yarrabah secondary school campus, with participation from ten students identified as at risk of disengaging from schooling. Students worked with a teacher and a qualified tradesperson to develop work readiness, competencies in trades areas and re-engage with school. As a final project, students were taught by local elders the art of building 'flatties', the traditional dugong hunting boat.

Projects aimed at preparing people for work have also emerged in Yarrabah. Since 2007 the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation has funded **Indigenous Employment and Training Officers** to provide culturally appropriate mentoring and support services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander apprentices, trainees and vocational students. They have also assisted many Yarrabah community members to prepare for employment and the transition into employment or training.



# Youth



**We have been proactive in working with community groups and agencies to create opportunities to reinforce positive messages to young people in the community. This includes ensuring that activities are designed specifically for the young people of Yarrabah and then resourced and delivered in a way that best meets their needs.**

Rugby league is a popular sport for people of all ages in Yarrabah, and great support is received by the local Seahawks Rugby League Football Club. The club has recently increased its role in engaging with local youth, currently fielding **ten junior rugby league teams** across the seven to 16 year age groups in competitions in Cairns.

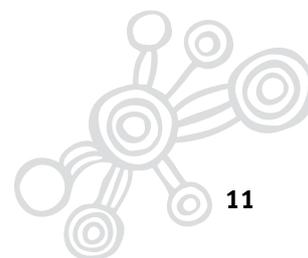
Since 2004, Yarrabah Police have hosted **State of Origin Youth Nights** at the local Police-Citizens Youth Club (PCYC), providing a safe and alcohol-free venue for young people to watch the game on the big screen. On average, each game is attended by some 300 young people, with a sausage sizzle before the game, and a bus service provided to transport locals safely to and from the event.

**The Yarrabah Youth Strategy** includes a four-pronged approach, addressing family and parental support, youth leadership, youth activities, and community safety. Under the strategy, community volunteers take young people **back to country**, engaging them in positive activities such as traditional storytelling and beach activities. Since the success of the **first camp at Yarrabah's Back Beach** in 2009, it has been funded as an ongoing event, where young people play touch football, beach cricket and enjoy quad bike riding over three days. This is supervised and supported by local organisations including YASC and the Yarrabah Police.

The **Djenghi Safe Housing Project**

(2009–2010) provided a role for youth in the construction of new houses in Djenghi. Youth were asked to respect the construction site as well as keep an eye out for any unlawful activity at the site. The young people were rewarded for their role with events such as barbecues and movie nights, attended by about 50 young people, held in parklands around the community. The **Dive-in Movie Night**, organised by the Yarrabah PCYC and held at the local pool in 2010, was a popular event with more than 350 children and young people in attendance. Due to the success of these activities, it is expected they become regular events.

In September 2010 a two-day **Youth Issues Forum** was held in Yarrabah. A number of young people spoke at the forum about local issues and presented recommendations to address them. Following the forum, funding was committed by the Government Champion to the YASC to establish a **Youth Advisory Council**. The first meeting of the Youth Advisory Council was held in February 2011. The forum is an initiative of the Government Champion and supported by YASC's Community Engagement Manager and the Department of Communities.



# Housing and infrastructure

Housing availability is an important concern for Yarrabah, with a number of programs funded by the Queensland and Australian Governments implemented since 2002 to improve the quality and availability of housing and reduce overcrowding.



From June 2002 to June 2006 the **Department of Communities** provided funding for social housing programs in Yarrabah. Achievements include 14 new constructions and 41 upgrades of existing houses. Social housing, funded as part of the **Rural and Remote Housing Project** from June 2002 to June 2010, targeted increases in the overall housing stock through new construction, to address issues with high levels of overcrowding, properties in need of repair and available serviced land. Twelve new houses built in 2010 were funded by this project. Additionally, from July 2006 to June 2010 the Department of Communities carried out a number of new constructions and upgrades under its **Housing Improvement Program**. The **Djenghi Subdivision Project** (stages 3 and 4) was completed in May 2010 and comprised the construction of approximately 40 additional allotments.

Over the period 2006 to 2010, and in cooperation with the Department of Communities' **Housing Improvement Program**, the Department of Public Works' QBuild has carried out maintenance services through the **Base Maintenance Program** to 298 rental properties in Yarrabah. Work commenced in December 2010 under the **National Affordable Housing Agreement Maintenance and Upgrade Program**, with funding for the upgrade of fourteen properties.

In 2003–2004 the Department of Communities' **Community Housing Management Strategy** assisted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander local governments to develop, establish and implement long-term tenancy and asset management capacity within their communities to increase the viability of housing programs. Support provided by the Department of Communities included on-site training of Council's housing officer on the effective implementation of a computerised

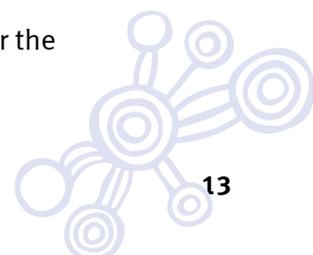
**Community Housing Management System**, and assisting Council to develop housing policy and procedure documents.

The **Queensland and Australian Government Joint Agency Infrastructure Program** has contributed significant funding for the improvements of environmental health infrastructure in Yarrabah from 2007 to 2010, such as the **major water supply improvements project** consisting of a new four kilometre-long, water main along Back Beach Road to enable the development of new housing at Djenghi. The project included the connection of additional bores to the town supply line to improve the delivery of water, which allowed the community to meet current and future demand and manage additional **fire fighting mains pressures**. The Department of Local Government and Planning has recently undertaken rectification works to the Djenghi sewage pump and pipe lines.

The Department of Local Government and Planning also engaged the Department of Main Roads to carry out various **repairs and maintenance to the existing roads** and drainage areas, which were completed in December 2010.

In addition to funding environmental health infrastructure and capability programs, the Queensland Government also provides funding through the State Government **Financial Aid Program** to support the cost to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Councils (including YASC) to deliver local government services.

In December 2010, the Department of Communities agreed to fund and manage finalisation of the **Yarrabah Planning Scheme**. Housing construction projects in Yarrabah funded by State and Commonwealth Governments will also provide employment and training opportunities for Yarrabah residents over the next four years.



# Community safety

**We are committed to enhancing the safety of the Yarrabah community. This can be achieved by ensuring all members of the community are aware of, and have access to, services available to them for their protection. We will continue to support the culture of Yarrabah to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.**

**Family Focus**, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-managed organisation, receives funding from the Department of Communities to provide **safe house services** in Yarrabah. The purpose of the safe houses is to provide in-community emergency and short-term accommodation placements, which meet the immediate protective and wellbeing needs of children. The service also provides **in-community family support services** to children and families and builds capacity for children to safely remain in, or return to, the family home. The overall objective is to reduce the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the protection system through enhanced community capacity to protect children.

The Department of Communities, Child Safety Services provides funding for a **foster care house**, to provide a safe and caring environment for children and young people where there is a cause for concern in their normal place of residence. A **family intervention service** is attached to the foster care house and provides practical assistance and support to young people and their families where there are child protection orders in place.

The **Yarrabah Aboriginal Corporation for Women** has managed the **Yarrabah Women's Shelter** for several years with funding from the Department of Communities. In 2009, the Yarrabah Aboriginal Corporation for Women, the Department of Communities and YASC identified a culturally appropriate site with in-principle approval from YASC and Traditional Owners for the construction of a new purpose-built women's shelter. Department of Communities is currently developing design options for the shelter.

Further support for families has been provided through programs like the **Domestic Violence – No Way Campaign** (2007–2009) addressing the issue of domestic violence. People involved in domestic violence, both victims and perpetrators, were contacted after the event by Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander police/police liaison officer staff in domestic violence follow-ups. The consequences of violence were outlined and permission sought for referral to other agencies to address the issues of the domestic violence. The majority of victims and perpetrators had not previously been aware of the help available to them.



# Economic development

One of our priorities is to identify sustainable, locally-managed, economic development strategies. Limited employment opportunities, the leakage of local income to outside communities (such as to Cairns), restricted infrastructure (e.g. public transport) and the global financial crisis, have contributed to economic barriers faced by the Yarrabah community. We are working hard to ensure the Yarrabah community have increased opportunities available to them despite these challenges.

Historically, numerous businesses have operated in Yarrabah, including a dentist, timber production, building team, bakery, pottery and fibreglass production, all with varying degrees of success and sustainability. However the largest employers in Yarrabah have continued to be the YASC and the Queensland Government, mainly Queensland Health.

On 21 October 2010, the Government Champion facilitated an **economic development forum** in Yarrabah, to identify local sustainable economic opportunities for development. Opened by the Mayor of Yarrabah, the forum was attended by some 30 stakeholders including a local youth representative as well as representatives from YASC, regional employment agencies, Indigenous Business Australia, the Queensland and Australian Governments, and two consultants from PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC).

The forum considered previous work undertaken to establish or sustain businesses in Yarrabah, case studies and critical success factors for other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses across the country. The forum identified local visions and priorities, and established an economic development working group to identify opportunities and aspirations that could contribute to local prosperity including business, training and employment opportunities in industries such as organic and other agriculture, bus and boat transport, construction, health and education services.

Through negotiations with the Queensland Government Champion, PwC have agreed to be the consultants for an economic development strategy in Yarrabah on a pro-bono basis, as part of their company's commitment to reconciliation. In December 2010, two consultants from PwC returned to Yarrabah to meet with the community and consider options, and will continue to engage with the **Economic Development Working Group** to progress opportunities.



# Conclusion

The Yarrabah community has benefited from a strong and positive working relationship between the community, YASC and the Queensland Government over many years.

Looking to the future, the continuation of these initiatives, and many more like them, will improve the opportunities and services available to the people of Yarrabah. The Queensland Government Champion and YASC are committed to working together to sustain a robust partnership, harnessing the strength of the private, government and community sectors and enabling growth and prosperity of the Yarrabah community.



## Acknowledgements

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- Cairns and Hinterland Health Service District, Queensland Health
- Department of the Premier and Cabinet
- Department of Communities
- Department of Education and Training
- Department of Public Works
- Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation
- Department of Justice and Attorney-General
- Department of Local Government and Planning
- Department of Environment and Resource Management
- Queensland Treasury
- Corrective Services
- Queensland Police

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