

## Commission of Inquiry into Queensland Police Service responses to domestic and family violence

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### COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO QUEENSLAND POLICE SERVICE RESPONSES TO DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

*Commissions of Inquiry Act 1950  
Section 5(1)(d)*

#### STATEMENT OF BRENDON MICHAEL MCMAHON

Name of Witness:	Brendon Michael McMahon
Date of birth:	
Current address:	
Occupation:	
Contact details (phone/email):	
Statement taken by:	Lara Soldi

I BRENDON MICHAEL MCMAHON make oath and state as follows:

1. I served as a police officer in the Queensland Police Service for 23 years. I recently retired in December 2018, having reached the retirement age of 60 years. Prior to working at the QPS, I served for 14 years in the Victoria Police Force and overseas with the United Nations Peace Keeping Force.
2. While a QPS officer I predominantly worked in remote areas and have extensive experience with police responses in regional Queensland. I was the Officer in Charge of the Aurukun Police Station from July 2010 to December 2014 and was responsible for establishing and coordinating multi-agency responses during major events, natural disasters and very serious community unrest. I also performed duties as the Officer in Charge of Pormpuraaw Police Station, Officer in Charge of the Far Northern Region Cross Cultural Unit, Generals Duties at Cairns Police Station and a number of other Cape Community Police Stations.
3. I also have experience with coordinating responses in regional Queensland at a governmental level. After transferring from the Queensland Police Service to the Queensland Government I was the inaugural Aurukun Senior Government Coordinator and reported directly to a Director-General of the Queensland Government from May 2016 to December 2018.

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4. When police commence at a regional station I have found that it is important they learn about the specific community which is now their home. I have authored a report in relation to remote policing and best practice for an officer to transition into a remote community.
5. In my experience, the vast majority of police I worked with and overviewed were dedicated, honest people who performed a dangerous job to protect others in the community, which was emotionally and physically demanding, each day. Very few outsiders can understand the self-reliance and resilience required of police officers, particularly those stationed in remote communities, to deal with what is seen, heard, tasted, smelt, and witnessed, and then do what is both ethically and legally required in a systematic and empathic way.
6. Many police serve in remote areas that are fractured and unstable, leading to serious crimes being committed, heightened tensions and large-scale unrest. It is important to remember most communities remain safe only by the daily work done by dedicated police officers.
7. Many other specialist service providers in remote communities are not available outside of business hours. In my experience, even when they are expected to be on call, it can be difficult to contact them. The police officers in the community commendably will be available and, in my experience, take on responsibilities that would otherwise fall upon other specialist services.
8. I have seen significant dysfunction in regional communities, including, bad health through bad nutrition, alcohol and drug abuse, smoking, chronic disease, and infections through poor hygiene. Many children witness violence constantly and are often raised in a domestic violence situation. A lifetime of learned violent behaviour is a big part of the reason for DFV in some remote communities. Therapeutic methods are needed to unpack this learned behaviour so it will not be carried to the next generation.
9. In my opinion, it is vital that key figures remain consistent in a community and do not shift at the same time. For example, the Police Officer in Charge should not leave at the same time as the School Principal or senior teachers, or the Director of Nursing, or senior Council staff. When changes in these individuals occurs, often at the end of the year, the consistency, stability and continuity in the community is lost which can take lengthy periods of time to be restored. This coordinated approach would require the different entities to be aware and notify each other when a significant change was due to occur. It would also be positive if judicial officers who are serving a regional community remained consistent for lengthier periods of time as well, for example, Magistrates allocated to a regional community should retain that circuit for at least one year.
10. In my experience, police attendance is often the most successful part of the chain of events in domestic and family violence incidents. However, there is room for improvement in

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other responses and preventative measures. The only successful response is founded in a plan which provides clear direction, identifies the key strategies, identifies the responsible agencies (at Federal, State, and Local government levels) and realistic performance measures. In my view there must be accountability, and one overseeing group, comprised of local councillors and influential State and Federal officials. The plan needs to be generational in length, rather than a 5-year and 10-year plan.

11. Long term commitment is required at a governmental level in order to see positive change. An example of a successful whole of government approach was the performance framework for agencies in Aurukun. This was called the 'The Premiers Aurukun 4 Point Response Plan'. It was announced on 14 June 2016, and centred around strengthening community safety, providing access to education, strengthening the community and its governance, and harnessing jobs and economic opportunity.
12. Another example of success was the Family Responsibility Commission (FRC) which pioneered the path towards local community control and I observed improvements in the Aurukun community. The strength of the local figures, by way of their cultural authority, and the respect for their decision-making resulted in many people taking responsibility for their own lives and behaviours.
13. However, while there have been isolated accomplishments, I have observed that often when a government coordinated plan created a small window of success, the attention and motivation to continue declined. The situation, on a superficial level, appeared to have improved, and the focus was taken away. Instead of persisting and turning the short-term success into a systemic change, this near-sighted attitude caused notable achievements, including notable changes to community attitudes and behaviours, to slowly erode and the dysfunctional issues returned.
14. In my experience, coordinated efforts between multiple agencies are required to provide effective support to regional communities. This requires long-term commitment from each of the agencies with significant support from the government.

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**OATHS ACT 1867 (DECLARATION)**

*Brendan McMahon*  
I (INSERT FULL NAME OF WITNESS HERE) do solemnly and sincerely declare that:

(1) This written statement by me dated \_\_\_\_\_ is true to the best of my knowledge and belief; and

(2) I make this statement knowing that if it were admitted as evidence, I may be liable to prosecution for stating in it anything I know to be false.

And I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing the same to be true and by virtue of the provisions of the Oaths Act 1867.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Taken and declared before me at *Margaret River* this *3* day of *August* 20*15*.

Taken By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Justice of the Peace / Commissioner for Declarations / Lawyer

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness Signature:

Doc No

\_\_\_\_\_  
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