Child Protection Inquiry Announced

Minister for Child Protection, Malarndirri McCarthy, today announced a public inquiry into the child protection system in the Northern Territory.

Ms McCarthy said the Inquiry will be conducted by three highly regarded child protection experts.

“Ensuring our child protection system is meeting the needs of Territorians is vital and this inquiry will look at systems, structures and resources within the Children and Families Division,” Ms McCarthy said.

“This broad ranging public Inquiry will review the child protection system and make recommendations on ways to strengthen and improve it.

“The Inquiry will be undertaken by child protection experts Dr Howard Bath, Professor Muriel Bamblett and Dr Rob Roseby and they will provide a report to the Territory Government by 25 April 2010.

“After discussions with my colleagues, key stakeholders in child protection, Gerry Wood, and receiving the first Children’s Commissioner Annual Report, I have decided that a full public Inquiry is required.

“It is important that everyone has confidence in our child protection arrangements and the Inquiry will be conducted publicly unless contributors request to remain confidential.

“I encourage all concerned people to have their say to this public Inquiry by making a submission.

“The Children’s Commissioner will also continue his review of the intake and response process within NT Families and Children he will complete by the end of this year.

“Delivery of child protection services is challenging in every jurisdiction and I am committed to ensuring we have the best possible system in place for Territory children.

“We’ve already made significant reform to improve the child protection system in the Territory by increasing the budget by $30 million since 2003, bringing it to $69 million this year.

“The introduction of the Care and Protection of Children Act, and the creation of the independent Children’s Commissioner, the establishment of the Child Deaths Review and Prevention Committee, since the Little Children are Sacred Report have all been important reforms to improve the system.

“This Inquiry will build on the work the Territory Government has already done to boost the care and protection of children,” Ms McCarthy said.

The Inquiry into the Child Protection System in the Northern Territory is to report and make recommendations on:

- the functioning of the current child protection system including the roles and responsibilities of Northern Territory Families and Children and other service providers involved in child protection;

- specific approaches to address the needs of Territory children in the child protection system, including the delivery of child protection services in regional and remote areas as part of the development of *A Working Future*;

- support systems and operational procedures for all workers engaged in child protection, in particular staff retention and training;

- quality, sustainability and strategic directions of out of home care programs including support systems for foster parents, carers and families;

- the interaction between government departments and agencies involved in child protection, care and safety and non-Government organisations and other groups involved in the protection, care and safety of children.

The Board of Inquiry will be made up of:

**Dr Howard Bath**

Dr Bath commenced as the Northern Territory Children’s Commissioner in July 2008. Prior to his appointment as the Children’s Commissioner, Dr Bath was engaged as an external consultant to deliver the 2007 Northern Territory Community Services High Risk Audit.

Dr Bath has extensive experience and has worked as a child welfare practitioner and researcher in both Australia and overseas.

**Professor Muriel Bamblett AM**

Professor Bamblett is CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and the former Chairperson of the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), a position she held for 11 years. She has been involved in a range of children’s councils and advisory committee over the last decade.

In 2004, she was made a member of the Order of Australia (AM) for her services to the community, particularly through leadership in the provision of services for Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander children and families. She was also awarded the Robin Clarke Award in 2003 for inspirational leadership in the field of child welfare in Victoria.
Dr Rob Roseby
Dr Rob Roseby is a respiratory and general paediatrician. Until June 2009, Dr Roseby was Head of Paediatrics at the Alice Springs Hospital. He is currently the Deputy Director of Adolescent Health at the Royal Children’s Hospital in Melbourne.

Dr Roseby was Chair of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians Northern Territory Committee from 2006 to 2008 and is a passionate advocate for Aboriginal health and wellbeing, particularly for children and adolescents.

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