



# Commission for Children and Young People in New South Wales

## NSW Child Protection Council

The New South Wales Government may soon set up a new Commission for Children and Young People in New South Wales. After the release of the Wood Royal Commission's Report in August 1997 detailing systemic failures in the child protection system, Premier Carr promised that a Children's Commission would be established. The Government released a Green Paper on the Children's Commission in December 1997 and tabled a Bill outlining the proposed functions and powers of the Children's Commission.

The Bill proposed that the Commission would have the following principal functions:

- to promote the participation of children in decision-making that affects their lives and to encourage government and non-government agencies to seek the participation of children appropriate to their age and development;
- to monitor the overall wellbeing of children in the community and trends in complaints made by or on behalf of children;
- to conduct special inquiries into issues affecting children when required by the Minister;
- to make recommendations to government and non-government agencies on legislation, policies, practices and services affecting children;
- to promote the provision of information and advice to assist children;
- to conduct, promote and monitor training on issues affecting children;
- to conduct, promote and monitor research into issues affecting children;
- to participate in and monitor screening for child-related employment;
- to develop and administer a voluntary accreditation scheme for people working with those who have committed sexual offences against children.

The Commission is to give priority to the interests and needs of children in out-of-home care, children in custody, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and other vulnerable children, but not deal directly with the complaints or concerns of individual children, who would be referred to the appropriate agency.

The Commission for Children and Young People will report to a joint parliamentary committee and will be headed by a commissioner, appointed for no more than two terms of three years each. The Bill provides for an eight-member expert advisory committee, comprising people with child-related expertise in the fields of health, education, child protection, child development, disabilities, the law, employment, sport or the arts. The resources of the New South Wales Child Protection Council (but not the Council itself) and the Child Death Review Team would move to the new Commission.

The full text of the Bill and the two related bills prohibiting employment for persons convicted of a serious sex offence against children and amending the *Ombudsman Act 1974* and the *Community Services (Complaints, Appeals and Monitoring) Act 1993* will be available on the Council's Internet home-page.

On 5 March 1998, the New South Wales Child Protection Council, together with

the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies, the State Network of Young People in Care and the Youth Action and Policy Association, held a forum at the State Library to allow for public discussion and debate on the Green Paper and to assist agencies in the preparation of their submissions. The forum included presentations by Patrick Parkinson, Associate Professor of Law, University of Sydney; Dr Judy Cashmore, Chairperson, New South Wales Child Protection Council; and Andrew O'Brien and Vanessa Francis, State Network of Young People in Care.

Approximately ninety government and non-government organisations were represented at the forum – a clear indication of the level of interest in the Government's proposal to establish a Children's Commission in New South Wales.

A report of the forum, edited by Eithne O'Donovan, is available from the New South Wales Child Protection Council. For the Council's submission about the Commission, see the Council's home-page: [www.acwa.asn.au/cpc/](http://www.acwa.asn.au/cpc/)

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## Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions

On 13 August 1998, a Commission of Inquiry was established to investigate allegations of abuse in government or non-government institutions or detention centres established or licensed under the *State Children Act 1911*, *Children's Services Act 1965*, or *Juvenile Justice Act 1992*. The Commission of Inquiry is currently inviting submissions and is required to report to the Queensland Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care by 1 March, 1999. Correspondence should be directed to the Commission of Inquiry at PO Box 554, Brisbane Qld 4003.