

14 May 2019

**Statement from Queensland Anti-Discrimination Commissioner Scott McDougall following Four Corners program on children being held in watch houses in Queensland.**

On 3 April 2019 I was part of delegation of agencies that inspected the Brisbane watch house facilities to observe firsthand the conditions experienced by children and young people remanded in custody pending the hearing of criminal charges. Later that day I was interviewed by Mark Willacy for the Four Corners program that aired last night.

The conditions I observed, and as were depicted in watch houses across Queensland in last night's program, reveal the treatment of children that belongs to an era in which human rights were not recognised and the dignity of children was neither valued nor protected.

I am deeply concerned about the potential for serious harm to be caused to children through their prolonged confinement in watch house holding pens.

It is abundantly clear that the material conditions children are exposed to in the watch house will engage rights protected under the Human Rights Act 2019 once the Act commences. These rights include the right to humane treatment when deprived of liberty, and arguably, the right to protection from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

The Queensland Government has committed \$320 million for a range of initiatives under a Youth Justice Strategy, including the construction of an additional 48 beds in existing and new detention facilities. Under this plan, 16 beds would become available in May 2020 and 32 beds in September 2020.

However, in light of the large numbers of children and young people detained for extended periods in watch houses during the last twelve months, it is unclear whether this additional capacity will be sufficient. I therefore remain concerned that children and young people will continue to be detained in watch houses for unreasonable periods, both before and after, the construction of the additional detention centre facilities.

The urgent construction of temporary accommodation within the existing detention facilities is one measure that the Commission has recommended to the Queensland Government. In 1994, the Goss Government was confronted with similar circumstances of overcrowding at the John Oxley Youth Detention Centre and was able to resolve the problem through the immediate construction of three demountable units. This option should be considered as a matter of priority.

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