



## AUSCRIPT AUSTRALASIA PTY LIMITED

ACN 110 028 825

**T:** 1800 AUSCRIPT (1800 287 274)

**E:** [clientservices@auscript.com.au](mailto:clientservices@auscript.com.au)

**W:** [www.auscript.com.au](http://www.auscript.com.au)

## TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

---

O/N H-1074789

**THE HON RONALD SACKVILLE AO QC, Chair**  
**THE HON ROSLYN ATKINSON AO, Commissioner**  
**MS BARBARA BENNETT PSM, Commissioner**  
**DR RHONDA GALBALLY AC, Commissioner**  
**MS ANDREA JANE MASON OAM, Commissioner**  
**MR ALASTAIR JAMES MCEWIN AM, Commissioner**  
**THE HON JOHN RYAN AM, Commissioner**

**ROYAL COMMISSION INTO VIOLENCE, ABUSE, NEGLECT AND  
EXPLOITATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY**

**BRISBANE**

**10.14 AM, MONDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2019**

**DAY 1**

**MR P. CRONAN AM appears as Acting Official Secretary**  
**MS R. TRESTON QC appears as Senior Counsel Assisting**  
**MS K. MELLIFONT QC appears as Senior Counsel Assisting**  
**MR A. FRASER appears as Junior Counsel Assisting**

CHAIR: Good morning, everybody. I apologise for the slight delay. That has been the result of the necessity for people to find their way into this room. I welcome everybody present today, in this hall, for the first public sitting of The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with  
5 Disability. I also welcome all those who are viewing or hearing these proceedings from other locations.

My name is Ronald Sackville. I have the honour and privilege to be the chair of The Royal Commission. Joining me today are my six distinguished co-Commissioners:  
10 the Honourable Roslyn Atkinson AO, immediately to my left; Commissioner Alastair McEwin AM, two from me to the left; Barbara Bennett PSM, to my extreme left; Professor Rhonda Galbally AC, two from me to the right; Andrea Mason OAM, to my immediate right; and the Honourable John Ryan AM, to my extreme right. I shall now ask Commissioner Mason to perform the Acknowledgement of  
15 Country.

COMMISSIONER MASON: As a Ngaanyatjarra and Karonie woman from Central Australia, I pay my respects to Turrbal, Jagera and Yuggera peoples, the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we assemble for the opening of the  
20 Disability Royal Commission. I honour your elders past and present, and I respectfully acknowledge all traditional owners here this morning.

CHAIR: I shall now ask the Acting Official Secretary of the Royal Commission to read the most significant parts of the Letters Patent issued under seal by the  
25 Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC, retired, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia. This is the formal document establishing the Royal Commission. While the language is perhaps not always easy to understand, and the document is quite long, the Letters Patent set out the tasks that this Royal Commission is required to perform and the manner in which it is to proceed. The  
30 reading of the key elements of the Letters Patent should therefore form a part of these proceedings.

MR CRONAN: Good morning.

35 *ELIZABETH THE SECOND, by the Grace of God, Queen of Australia and Her other Realms and Territories, Head of the Commonwealth*

*TO*

40 *The Honourable Ronald Sackville AO QC,*  
*Ms Barbara Bennett PSM,*  
*Dr Rhonda Louise Galbally AC,*  
*Ms Andrea Jane Mason OAM,*  
*Mr Alastair James McEwin AM,*  
45 *The Honourable John Francis Ryan AM, and*  
*The Honourable Roslyn Gay Atkinson AO*

*GREETING*

5 *RECOGNISING that people with disability are equal citizens and have the right to the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including respect for their inherent dignity and individual autonomy.*

10 *AND that people with disability have the same rights as other members of Australian society to live and participate in safe environments free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.*

*AND all forms of violence against, and abuse, neglect and exploitation of, people with disability are abhorrent.*

15 *AND Australia has international obligations to take appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures to promote the human rights of people with disability, including to protect people with disability from all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.*

20 ...

*AND it is important that violence against, and abuse, neglect and exploitation of, people with disability in all settings and contexts are exposed and examined, including through the sharing of individual experiences.*

25 *AND it is important that people with disability are central to processes that inform best practice decision-making on what all Australian Governments and others can do to prevent and respond to violence against, and abuse, neglect and exploitation of, people with disability.*

30 *AND all Australian Governments have expressed their support for, and undertaken to cooperate with, your inquiry.*

35 *NOW THEREFORE We do, by these Our Letters Patent ... require and authorise you to inquire into the following matters:*

40 *(a) what governments, institutions and the community should do to prevent and better protect people with disability from experiencing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, having regard to the extent of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation experienced by people with disability in all settings and contexts;*

45 *(b) what governments, institutions and the community should do to achieve best practice to encourage reporting of and effective investigations of and responses to violence against and abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability, including addressing failures in and impediments to reporting, investigating and responding to such conduct;*

*(c) what should be done to promote a more inclusive society that supports the independence of people with disability and their right to live free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.*

...

5

*AND We direct you to make any recommendations arising out of your inquiry that you consider appropriate, including recommendations about any policy, legislative, administrative or structural reforms. We direct you, for the purposes of your inquiry and recommendations, to have regard to the following matters:*

10

*(e) all forms of violence against and abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability, whatever the setting or context;*

15

*(f) all aspects of quality and safety of services, including informal supports provided by governments, institutions and the community to people with disability, including the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the NDIS quality and safeguarding framework agreed by all Australian governments in 2017;*

20

*(g) the specific experiences of violence against and abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability are multilayered and influenced by experiences associated with their age, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, intersex status, ethnic origin or race, including the particular situation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culturally and linguistically diverse people with disability;*

25

*(h) the critical role of families, carers, advocates, the workforce and others play in providing care and support to people with disability;*

30

*(i) examples of best practice and innovative models of preventing, reporting, investigating or responding to violence against and abuse, neglect or exploitation of people with disability;*

35

*(j) the findings or recommendations or previous relevant reports and inquiries.*

*And we require you to begin your inquiry as soon as practicable, and require you to make your inquiry as expeditiously as possible, and require you to submit to our Governor-General an interim report that you consider appropriate not later than 30 October 2020, and require you to submit to our Governor-General a report of the results of your inquiry and your recommendations not later than 29 April 2022. In witness, we have caused these our letters to be made patent. Witness General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC, retired, Governor-General of Australia, and by amending Letters Patent issued under the seal of the Honourable David Hurley, AC Detective Senior Constable, retired, Governor-General of the Commonwealth*

45

5 CHAIR: I shall now ask Commissioner Mason to make an opening statement.

COMMISSIONER MASON: I recognise that today we gather on sacred ground. Sacred because it's from this place, we will uncover uncomfortable truths. It's from this place we will hear stories of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. It's from  
10 this place that brave First Nations people with disability will finally be heard. The enormity of the task ahead is well understood by First Nations people with disability, their advocates and allies. Seven-point-three per cent of First Nations people, or around 60,000 people, have a severe or profound disability compared with 5.8 per cent in the non-Indigenous community.

15 Accounting for different age profiles in First Nations and non-Indigenous communities, First Nations people are twice as likely as others to have a severe or profound disability. These numbers do not include First Nations people with disability who are homeless, living in prison or enclosed institutions. In some places,  
20 the experience of abuse to First Nations people with disability is an open secret and in plain sight, with stories told and retold in family and community settings. For others, the abuse happens behind closed doors, away from the transparency and accountability of community, family and culture.

25 Our purpose as a Commission is to shine a much needed spotlight to reveal the instances of abuse of First Nations people with disability wherever it has occurred. Our findings, of course, are reliant on the willingness of First Nations people to share their experiences with us. The Commission understands that for many, that will be difficult. We acknowledge that such stories are deeply personal, hurtful and often a  
30 source of personal trauma. I want to reassure all First Nations people, their carers and advocates that this Royal Commission, with all of its powers and protections, is a safe place for you to speak your truth and in your first language if you so desire.

35 First Nations people are already marginalised in the Australian community. Having a disability makes them part of a marginalised group, within a marginalised group. They experience racism and ethnocentrism, like other First Nations brothers and sisters experience. However, they see, hear and feel a greater level of discrimination above what I and other brothers and sisters experience because they have a disability.  
40 I have heard disability advocates explain that First Nations people with disability have a lived experience that they describe as a type of apartheid. They have experienced times of exclusion, invisibility and being at the edge of our society. They are often not afforded the equality of respect and access to opportunities that other non-disabled Australians expect as their ordinary right to receive.

45 Non-Indigenous Australians with disability have described their life circumstances in similar ways, and if their description of life feels like and behaves like a system of

apartheid, then we have a point of reference from which we want to understand and depart from towards a different future. But I have also seen the resilience of our brothers and sisters of the power of an inclusive First Nations culture based in kindness and of local initiatives that have afforded a dignity of independence for  
5 First Nations people with disability. As such they are able to exercise their authority as traditional owners and as Australians. We are eager, too, to hear about these positive efforts.

10 In closing, I want to make a promise. We will listen with empathy and consideration, identify the shortcomings, propose remedies and make certain that permanent solutions are reached for First Nations people with disability and, indeed, for all Australians with disability to live their lives free of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. We are here for you.

15 CHAIR: Thank you, Commissioner Mason. It is entirely appropriate and indeed symbolic that the first hearing of the Royal Commission should be taking place in the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre. This very large centre was designed in 1992 and construction commenced in 1993 early. At that stage, no consultations had  
20 taken place with groups representing people with disability. Perhaps not surprisingly, the main entrance to the building was designed so as to be inaccessible to anyone who could not climb a rather formidable staircase. There was an alternative entry to the centre 40 metres away, but that meant travelling through a corridor to a lift, thereby effectively segregating people who could not use the stairs from everybody else.

25 A complaint was subsequently brought to the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Tribunal by Kevin Cocks, who subsequently became the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Commissioner. The president of the tribunal found that the failure by the state of Queensland to provide an accessible front entrance to the centre was a  
30 breach of the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Act of 1991. The tribunal ordered the state of Queensland to commission the construction of an accessible front entrance at a cost of about \$300,000 in 1994 dollars. That is how the Convention Centre became accessible to everyone. By happy coincidence, the president of the tribunal who decided that case of historic importance is now a member of this Royal Commission,  
35 Commission Atkinson, sitting on my immediate left.

You have already heard very moving words from Commissioner Mason, who is an inspiring and very wise leader of First Nations communities. Commissioner  
40 McEwin will speak soon and will rightly emphasise the importance of the Commission including people with lived experience of disability. He and Commissioner Galbally have exceptionally distinguished records of advocacy and achievements in advancing the rights of people with disability. Both have been  
45 justly recognised for their tireless work and leadership within the disability and wider communities. Commissioners Bennett and Ryan have long experience in public policy and bring a wealth of knowledge to the Royal Commission.

Let me deal with the framework. As I'm sure most of you know, Royal Commissions have been much in the news in Australia in recent years, but they actually have a very long history. In this country, the first Royal Commission was established by the colony of Victoria in 1854. This particular Royal Commission is set up under a Commonwealth law, known as the Royal Commissions Act 1902. This was one of the first laws enacted by the Commonwealth Parliament after federation, the founding of the Australian nation on 1 January 1901.

This very early national legislation shows the importance that the first Parliament of this nation attached to Royal Commissions as a means of investigating and reporting on matters of national significance. The 1902 Act and similar state legislation confers very significant powers and responsibilities on Royal Commissions. A Royal Commission has power, for example, to compel people or organisations to produce documents and to summons persons to give evidence. These are powers to be exercised with care. They are not intended to be used to compel people with disability to do anything other than engage with the Royal Commission of their own free will and with appropriate support.

Each Royal Commission is established under its own Letters Patent, which contain the Terms of Reference under which the Commission must operate. The most significant parts of the Commission's Terms of Reference have been read out by the acting official secretary this morning. During the 119 years since federation, the Commonwealth has established many Royal Commissions. Often, they have been required to investigate forms of abuse or wrongdoing and to make recommendations on broad questions of social policy arising out of or connected to those investigations. Examples include the recent Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, which sat from 1987 to 1991, and the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, which is currently underway. This Royal Commission is another example. It has both investigative and policy functions.

The story of the Royal Commission. Behind every Royal Commission is a story. Calls for a Royal Commission into violence and abuse against people with disability have been made for a long time in this country. The proposal received support in 2012 when disability advocates called for a Royal Commission into widespread allegations of abuse of people with disability who were living in care. A Four Corners report on television in November 2014 alleged abuse at one of Australia's largest service providers, and led to a petition calling for an immediate national inquiry to address the violence and abuse experienced by people with disability.

In response, the Senate Community Affairs References Committee published a report, on 25 November 2015. Its very first recommendation was that a Royal Commission be called into violence, abuse and neglect of people with disability. The Senate Committee recommended that the Terms of Reference be drafted in consultation with people with disability, their families and supporters, and with disability organisations.

The Senate Committee's recommendations did not mean that the struggle was over. Disability advocates and others continued to press vigorously for the establishment of a Royal Commission over the next three years.

5 On 14 February 2019, the Senate passed a motion calling on the Government to issue Letters Patent for a Royal Commission and a few days later, on 18 February 2019, the Prime Minister moved in the House of Representatives that the motion for the establishment of a Royal Commission be approved.

10 This Royal Commission is therefore the product of tireless and persistent efforts by disability advocates and many others who have long recognised that people with disability in this country are routinely subjected to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

15 The Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission were finalised after a public consultation process which included a survey to which nearly 4000 people responded. In addition, 65 written submissions were received from organisations and individuals. About three quarters of the respondents to the survey were people with disability or parents, family members or carers of persons with disability. The  
20 consultation process, although conducted within a tight timeframe, involved people with disability, their families and carers, disability advocacy groups, individual advocates and State and Territory Governments.

The Terms of Reference, that were read out this morning, therefore not only reflect  
25 the views and priorities of disability advocates (many of whom, of course, have lived experience with disability), but they also reflect the views of a broad sample of the people with whom this Royal Commission is concerned above all – the hundreds of thousands of people who live with disability and who may have experienced  
30 violence, abuse, exploitation or neglect.

Now, let me come back to the Terms of Reference. I want to make four points in particular about the Terms of Reference that govern the inquiry of this Royal Commission.

35 First; breadth: the Terms of Reference are extraordinarily broad. Among other things we are required to expose violence against, and abuse, neglect and exploitation of, people with disability in all settings and contexts. We are to do this by means that include the sharing of individual experiences. In doing so, we are to recognise that the experiences of people with disability are, in the language of the  
40 Terms of Reference, “multilayered”.

The potential scope of our inquiry is actually, therefore, considerably wider than, for example, that of the Child Abuse Royal Commission. That Royal Commission, which issued its Final Report five years after commencing its work, was required to  
45 focus on the systemic failure by institutions to adequately deal with allegations of child sexual abuse and to make recommendations as to how institutions and governments could better protect against child sexual abuse in institutional contexts.



The subject matter of our inquiry is much more open-ended, if only because we are not confined to abuse within institutions.

5 All of us are deeply conscious of the magnitude and complexity of the task ahead of us. It is truly formidable. We cannot complete that task successfully unless people with disability who have experienced violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation are prepared to tell their stories to the Commission

10 We recognise that people with disability must be able to engage with the Royal Commission in a totally safe and supportive environment. We understand, too, that it is critical that the Commission's procedures and practices are designed so as to minimise the risk of re-traumatising people who engage with us. We also recognise that there will be many people who are unable or very reluctant to come forward to tell us of their experiences. This is likely to be true of people with disability who  
15 have difficulties in communicating, live in closed communities or experience homelessness. It will also be the case, as Commissioner Mason has already explained, with many First Nations people, particularly those in remote communities. We therefore have to reach out actively, to allow all those people to take advantage of what may be a once in a lifetime opportunity. We have to ensure that unheard  
20 voices are finally heard.

The second point I want to make about the Terms of Reference concerns a rights-based focus. The Terms of Reference expressly recognise that Australia has obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to  
25 promote the human rights of people with disability. In the balance of my remarks, I refer to this Convention as "the UN Convention". It's not the only UN Convention, but it's the one with which we are principally concerned.

30 The UN Convention sets out the fundamental human rights of people with disability, including civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights. It provides criteria against which to assess Australia's treatment of people with disability, and it sets standards which can be implemented – or better still, actually implemented – to ensure that people with disability live free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

35 The express recognition, in the Letters Patent, the Terms of Reference, of Australia's obligations under the UN Convention means that this Royal Commission must have a rights-based focus. We must take as our starting point the rights under international law that Australia is required to recognise and protect.

40 This is not the time to go through the UN Convention in detail, but it is important to note several key provisions that will inform and guide the work of the Royal Commission.

45 Article 1 states that the purpose of the UN Convention is quote:

*to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.*

5 Article 3 sets out the principles of the UN Convention. Those principles should be quoted in full, and I do so:

- 10 (a) *Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons;*
- (b) *Non-discrimination;*
- (c) *Full and active participation and inclusion in society;*
- (d) *Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity;*
- 15 (e) *Equality of opportunity;*
- (f) *Accessibility;*
- (g) *Equality between men and women;*
- (h) *Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.*

20

Article 16 of the UN Convention is very important. It requires Australia to take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social, educational and other measures to protect people with disability, both within and outside the home, from all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse, including their gender-based aspects.

25

A number of other international instruments are relevant to the work of the Commission. I shall mention them briefly:

30 First, the Convention on the Rights of the Child is important for children with disability. Article 23 provides that children who have any kind of disability should receive special care and support so that they can live a full and independent life, with an emphasis on dignity, promoting self-reliance in facilitating active participation in the community.

35 Secondly, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women is important for girls and women with disability.

40 Thirdly, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination is important for culturally and linguistically diverse people with disability and First Nations people with disability.

45 Fourthly, the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People is also important for First Nations people with disability. Articles 22 and 23 provide that attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of (among others) indigenous persons with disability.

These and the other provisions of the UN Convention will guide the Royal Commission in its work.

5 The third point about the Terms of Reference or Letters Patent concerns First Nations people with disability, about whom Commissioner Mason has already spoken. The Terms of Reference specifically state that we must take into account the particular situation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As Commissioner Mason has so eloquently explained, we therefore have a special responsibility to expose the nature and extent of the violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation experienced by  
10 First Nations people and to address the root causes of their experiences. Even if our Terms of Reference did not include the specific direction to take account of the experiences of First Nations people with disability, we would not be doing our job unless we did exactly that.

15 The evidence is overwhelming that First Nations people have substantially higher levels of disability than non-Indigenous people, and the evidence also demonstrates that the prevalence of abuse experienced by First Nations people with disability is substantially greater than that experienced by non-Indigenous people with disability. In other words, First Nations people with disability are especially vulnerable to abuse  
20 of one kind or another.

In dealing with this issue, we need to understand and address the multiple kinds of disadvantage, not excluding racism, experienced by First Nations people with disability in this country. This too is a big task, but it can be successfully performed  
25 with the active involvement of First Nations people with disability in the work of the Royal Commission, as Commissioner Mason has said this morning.

The fourth part of the Terms of Reference that I wish to mention concerns previous reports. The Terms of Reference state that we must take into account the findings  
30 and recommendations of previous reports and inquiries. It is actually quite remarkable just how many reports and inquiries in Australia and overseas have addressed issues relevant to abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability. In Australia, in relatively recent times, reports have been prepared by  
35 Commonwealth and state parliamentary committees, the Productivity Commission, law reform commissions, ombudsman, public guardians, Commonwealth and state Human Rights Commissions and numerous other bodies supplemented by the work of scholars in universities and research institutes.

40 It is clearly important that we take advantage of the excellent work that has already been done in areas such as health, education, the justice system, accommodation, employment and access to facilities and services. We must not attempt to reinvent the wheel, but we do need to analyse why, despite the multitude of reports and inquiries, people with disability continue to experience unacceptable levels of abuse, and why the objective of full and effective participation and inclusion in society is so  
45 difficult to achieve. Why have the recommendations that have been made by so many inquiries and so many reports not led to the hope for improvements in the lives

of people with disability? That question is one we have to answer. It is a very important question.

5 Let me talk now about opportunities for change. Just as we are conscious of the magnitude of the task that the Commission faces, we're also conscious that the disability community and their supporters, as well as the wider Australian community, have extremely high expectations of this Royal Commission. People want and expect real change. They want practical effect to be given to the rights-based approach and principles of inclusion expressed in the UN Convention and, indeed, in domestic legislation. Simply repeating the recommendations and proposals made by previous inquiries will not achieve that result, but there are grounds for optimism.

15 Australia is by no means a perfect society, but Australians have demonstrated a willingness over time to embrace seismic shifts in social attitudes. We only have to think of the Commonwealth Parliament legislating to recognise same-sex marriage. Who would have believed 20 or even 15 years ago that Australians would not only accept, but resoundingly endorse such a fundamental redefinition of marriage? Other transformational changes have occurred in this country within a relatively short period. Think of the changed role of women in Australian society, however far we may have to go, and the virtually universal contemporary recognition of the urgent need to address and eliminate the scourge of domestic violence.

25 Some of these transformational changes have been brought about, or at least hastened very substantially by Royal Commissions. The clearest example is the work of the Child Abuse Royal Commission. Perhaps its principal success was in forcing the wider Australian community to acknowledge the appalling extent of child sexual abuse and the complicity of some of the most trusted institutions in Australia in allowing that abuse to occur. The exposure of these terrible events does not mean that all child sexual abuse has been eliminated, but it is highly unlikely that anything remotely like what happened in so many institutions over so many decades could ever happen again. The Child Abuse Royal Commission has brought about transformational change.

35 Let me now talk a little about public hearings. Public hearings have a vital role to play in the work of the Royal Commission. The object of public hearings include, first, to allow people with disability who wish to tell their stories to do so with full support and assistance; secondly, to expose, as our Terms of Reference require, examples of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation; thirdly, to identify systemic failures that allow violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation to occur in different contexts; fourthly, where appropriate and subject to proper procedural safeguards, to permit findings to be made about wrongful conduct by individuals, institutions or organisations; fifthly, to examine policy questions raised by case studies or by other evidence gathered by the Royal Commission; and sixthly, to promote measures that governments, institutions and the community should introduce to protect people with disability and to promote a more inclusive society.

With the active participation of people with disability and the disability community at large, the Royal Commission provides an opportunity to achieve transformational change. It is a very large challenge, but it is one that should be embraced.

5 Let me talk briefly about progress to date. When people hear that a Royal  
Commission is being created and Commissioners appointed in the case of a multi-  
member Royal Commission, it's natural to assume that the Commission is all ready  
to start its work immediately. In fact, getting a Royal Commission underway is very  
much like setting up a new and very large organisation almost from scratch, although  
10 the Attorney-General's Department, luckily, is very experienced in dealing with the  
process.

In the last four months, the actions taken by or on behalf of the Royal Commission  
include the following. Suitable premises have been obtained in Brisbane and  
15 Sydney. This process necessarily took some time. Building modifications are  
planned but have not yet commenced. The Royal Commission has a physical  
presence in Canberra and Adelaide, and in due course our presence will be extended  
to other places. The Royal Commission's offices in Brisbane, Sydney and Canberra  
need to meet leading universal accessibility design principles in order to be  
20 accessible and inclusive. These principles have informed the selection of the offices  
in both Brisbane and Sydney and are being applied to all facets of the office fit-out  
and design.

Staff have been recruited, of course, commencing with the appointment of the  
25 Official Secretary, a Senior Executive, a Finance Manager and support staff member  
when Letters Patent were issued in April 2019. Since then, we have recruited 106  
staff with a range of skills, including policy and research, legal, data analysis,  
community engagement, social work and corporate services. The Royal Commission  
recruits staff using an Affirmative Measures Employment Register, which operates in  
30 addition to the standard employment register and is open to candidates with  
disability. Consistent with the requirements of the Public Service Act, this measure  
is designed to address the underrepresentation of people with disability in the  
Australian Public Service. Currently, about 10 per cent of staff have reported that  
they have a disability, and a number of these staff members were employed through  
35 the Affirmative Measures Employment Register.

The Royal Commission has conducted eight workshops in Brisbane, Sydney,  
Melbourne and Darwin. Reports on those workshops are available on the website.  
The first community forum was successfully held in Townsville a week ago, on 9  
40 September 2019. A number of research projects have been commenced covering a  
range of topics. The Royal Commission has also reached a number of other  
milestones which senior counsel assisting the Royal Commission, Ms Rebecca  
Treston QC, will discuss in more detail in her address. These do include the opening  
of submissions, the publication of Draft Accessibility Strategy, which is on the  
45 Commission's website, and other measures. Senior counsel will also provide more  
detail about support services for people engaging with the Royal Commission.

May I now address the question of conflict of interest. Many of you will be aware that there has been some controversy about the composition by reason of what has been said to be a conflict of interest affecting two Commissioners. The composition of the Royal Commission is, of course, a matter for government, not for the  
5 Commission. But the management of what lawyers call a perception of conflict of interest and a reasonable apprehension of bias is a matter for the Commission.

A statement of how the Royal Commission intends to manage those issues has been placed on the Commission's website. It would not normally be necessary for me to  
10 repeat the key points here, but in the circumstances it is appropriate to do so. The key points are as follows:

First, it is essential that the Commission has the confidence of the public, and of the disability community in particular, that it will discharge its responsibilities  
15 independently, thoroughly and transparently.

Secondly, there is nothing unusual about Royal Commissions having to manage perceptions of conflicts of interest or apprehended bias. Indeed, it is almost inevitable that if Governments choose Commissioners because of their experience  
20 and expertise in a particular area under investigation, perceptions of potential conflicts of interest or apprehensions of bias may arise.

Thirdly, there are well established mechanisms to enable Royal Commissions to handle perceptions of conflicts of interest or apprehensions of bias.  
25

Fourthly, the Act, the Royal Commissions Act, states that the Chair of a multi-member Royal Commission must determine which Commissioners are authorised to conduct or participate in a particular hearing.

I, as Chair, will not authorise a Commissioner to participate in a public hearing if that  
30 Commissioner's participation would give rise to a reasonable perception of a conflict of interest or a reasonable apprehension of bias.

Next, a Commissioner who does not participate in a public hearing will not  
35 participate in the preparation of any report produced as a direct result of that hearing.

Next, under no circumstances will a Commissioner participate in a hearing or in deliberations concerning matters that might bear in any way on that Commissioner's past conduct or the discharge of his or her responsibilities in a previous role.  
40

The Parliament has just now passed legislation amending the Royal Commissions Act to enable the Commission to conduct private sessions for people with disability who wish to tell their stories safely, securely and in private to a Commissioner.

I will regard the overriding consideration in the exercise of power to authorise  
45 Commissioners to hold private sessions to be the safety, security and comfort of the person wishing to engage with the Commission. Under no circumstances will

anyone be asked to tell their story to a Commissioner with whom they do not feel comfortable.

5 I should add that between us, Commissioner Atkinson and I have over 40 years of service as judicial officers. I know that is hard to believe because of our youthful appearance, but it is true. We have extensive experience in dealing with conflicts of interest and apprehended bias. We will use that experience as required.

10 The future. The Royal Commission plans to conduct its first public hearings later this year. There is still a good deal of work to be done before the plans are finalised. Senior counsel will elaborate shortly.

15 The Commission will also undertake an extensive research program, some of which is already underway.

20 But the most important part of the Royal Commission's work is our engagement with people with disability, their families and supporters. Your contributions will be the heart and soul of this Royal Commission. You are the key to its success. I now invite Commissioner McEwin to make opening remarks.

25 COMMISSIONER MCEWIN: The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability was established to address an epidemic social issue of human rights violations against people with disability in Australian society. We know that thousands of people with disability have  
30 experienced violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation in their lives. We know that many people with disability have been injured and have died as a result of the actions or inactions of those they trusted to support them. This Royal Commission provides us with an opportunity to comprehensively examine the injustices experienced by people with disability and what should be done to promote a more inclusive society; a society that supports the independence of people with disability and their right to live free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

35 The Royal Commission came about through many years of advocacy by people with disability and their allies. We pay tribute to their efforts to shine a spotlight on this issue. We say to them: the establishment of this Royal Commission is your achievement. Your human rights are and will be at the heart of everything we do at this Royal Commission.

40 The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities underpins the Letters Patent for the Royal Commission. The Convention is a landmark rights-based document in the history of international disability rights. It recognises that it is society's attitudinal and environmental barriers that prevent people with disability from leading full and productive lives on an equal basis with others.

45 The Convention enshrines the rights of people with disability to be fully included in all aspects of society. It enshrines the right of people with disability to be educated with their non-disabled peers, in general educational settings. It enshrines the right

to work in a labour market that is open and inclusive. It enshrines the right of people with disability to receive the same free or affordable health care services as provided to non-disabled people. It enshrines the right of people with disability to have access to justice on an equal basis with others. And it enshrines the right for people with  
5 disability to choose where and with whom they wish to live independently in the community.

For far too long people with disability in Australia have been denied the right to make their own decisions with appropriate support. For far too long people with  
10 disability have been denied the dignity of risk and the freedom to choose how to live their own lives with independence. Our society cannot be allowed to protect people with disability to the extent that they cannot choose to live their own lives as they wish and to experience the consequences of those choices. We must avoid  
15 protectionism to the point of not allowing people with disability to take risks as any person would expect to do so in our society.

Accessibility is also at the heart of everything we do at this Royal Commission. It will be accessible to all who seek to engage with it. The Royal Commission will also take proactive steps to reach out to those in hard-to-reach communities; in particular  
20 those in rural and remote areas and those in closed settings. And the way we communicate will be premised on the individual needs of how people choose to communicate.

Our work will ensure the needs of people with disability whose experiences are associated with characteristics including age, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual  
25 orientation, intersex status, ethnic origin or race. In particular we recognise the needs of First Nations people with disability and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

30 The international disability community's mantra is "Nothing about us without us". Your individual stories and experiences along with your expertise and knowledge about what works will be central to examining processes that have resulted in systemic failures, as well as success.

35 It is a privilege to be one of the two Commissioners with disability with this Royal Commission. I, along with Commissioner Galbally, know that the task of disability reform in Australia is not an easy one. Our lived experiences and expertise will strongly contribute to the work of the Royal Commission.

40 Building from the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, this Royal Commission will work towards ensuring people with disability are free of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation as they fully participate in mainstream Australian society.

45 CHAIR: Ms Treston, Senior Counsel Assisting the Royal Commission.



MS R. TRESTON QC: May it please the Commission. I have been appointed by the Attorney-General as one of the Senior Counsel Assisting this Royal Commission, and Mr Andrew Fraser, who appears with me this morning, has been appointed as one of the Junior Counsel Assisting. With us at the bar table today is Ms Kerri  
5 Mellifont QC, who has also been appointed by the Attorney-General as one of the Senior Counsel Assisting this Royal Commission. And behind us is Mr Ben Power and Ms Janice Crawford, both of whom have also been appointed as Junior Counsel Assisting. We are supported by the Solicitor Assisting the Commission, Mr Andras Markus, and a team of lawyers under his direction.

10 The Terms of Reference set out that the Commission is to have regard to all forms of violence against, and abuse, neglect and exploitation of, people with disability, whatever the setting or context. For the purposes of its work, the Royal Commission has provisionally defined some key terms as follows:

15 First, the terms “violence and abuse” include assault, sexual assault, constraints, restrictive practices (both physical and chemical), forced treatments, forced interventions, humiliation and harassment, financial and economic abuse and significant violations of privacy and dignity on a systemic or individual basis.

20 Second, the term “neglect” includes physical and emotional neglect, passive neglect and wilful deprivation. Neglect can be a single significant incident or a systemic issue that involves depriving a person with disability of the basic necessities of life such as food, drink, shelter, access, mobility, clothing, education, medical care and  
25 treatment.

30 Third, the term “exploitation” means the improper use of another person or the improper use of or withholding of another person’s assets, labour, employment or resources including taking physical, sexual, financial or economic advantage.

As the Chair has noted, the scope of the inquiry is broad, and the task before us is a large one. But the work of the Royal Commission is crucial, and it is overdue.

35 Almost one in five Australians have a disability. The prevalence of disability increases with age – around one in eight people aged under 65 have some level of disability, rising to one in two for those aged 65 and over.

40 We know that people with disability experience high rates of violence. Every 10 minutes, someone with profound or severe disability experiences physical or sexual violence.

45 According to the 2016 ABS Personal Safety Survey, in a 12 month period, 330,400 adults with disability or a long term health condition – or one in every 18 – experienced sexual or physical violence. At least 54,800 adults with profound or severe disability (adopting the terms used in the ABS survey) experienced sexual or physical violence in the previous 12 months. The same survey reported that in the previous 12 months, around 860,000 people with disability or a long term health

condition – or one in every seven – experienced sexual harassment, most commonly inappropriate comments about their body or sex life. The figure is even higher for women with disability. First Nations people with disability experience higher rates of violence. Nearly one in every six First Nations people with disability were the victims of physical violence in the last 12 month period.

These figures are troubling. But more troubling still are the higher rates of violence and harassment of people with disability than others in the community. Compared to people without disability, people with a disability or a long term health condition are significantly more likely to experience sexual harassment, stalking and physical violence. Some people with disability experience violence, harassment and stalking at even higher rates: these include young people, people with profound or severe disability, and people with psychological or intellectual disability.

It is important to recognise that violence towards people with disability is gendered. Having a disability or long-term health condition increases the risk of violence, sexual harassment and stalking for women, but not for men. Compared to women without disability, women with a disability or long-term health condition were significantly more likely to experience violence, sexual harassment and stalking.

These experiences of violence have a serious impact on the lives of people with disability and their feelings of safety and security in the community, whether or not they themselves have been victims of violence. In the past 12 months, 674,000 people with disability or a long term health condition avoided using public transport alone after dark because they felt unsafe. Over one million avoided walking in their local area alone after dark because they felt unsafe, and 550,000 felt unsafe when at home alone after dark.

These statistics are even starker for First Nations people. In the past 12 months, over 20 per cent of First Nations people with a disability or long term health condition felt unsafe at home after dark. Over 50 per cent felt unsafe walking in their local area alone after dark.

People with a disability also face social and economic exclusion. According to the 2015 data, the median weekly income of people with disability was less than half that of that with a person with no reported disability. Working-age people with disability are twice as likely as those without disability to be unemployed.

The Letters Patent direct the Commission to have regard to the multilayered nature of a person with disability’s experiences of violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation, as these experiences are influenced by other features of the person and their lives. As I have just described, First Nations people and women with disability may have different experiences to others. The Commission should also consider whether and how a person with disability’s experience as a migrant influences their experience of violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation. For example, the health requirements for visas have been criticised as discriminatory, including the focus on how much it would “cost” the government to support a person with disability. There is also, of

course, the position of people with disability seeking asylum, including those in Australian immigration detention.

5 The Chair earlier spoke about the rights-based focus of the Royal Commission, being guided by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability. A key concept throughout the Articles of that Convention is that people with disability are entitled to rights “on an equal basis with others”.

10 The statistical information set out today demonstrates that the Australian community has a very long way to go before people with disability realise the rights that they are entitled to enjoy.

15 As you can see, there is already a significant amount of information available about violence against people with disability. In addition to these statistics, there have been multiple inquiries into the disability sector and barriers facing people with disability in a number of Australian jurisdictions. The Chair has addressed in his remarks today the relevance of the Commission’s work that has already been done by other bodies.

20 The Royal Commission will also gather its own information through a number of engagement mechanisms, including submissions and compulsory processes.

25 The Commission is developing a range of mechanisms to ensure all Australians are provided with the opportunity to engage with the work of the Commission. As a starting point, this has included community forums, stakeholder workshops, private sessions, and other forms of formal and informal engagement.

30 The Commission recognises the importance of engaging with a broad range of stakeholders, including peak bodies, advocates, support providers and representative bodies. However, it is also critical that the Commission actively seek to engage with people with disabilities themselves. The Commission is currently developing a strategic engagement plan that allows for specialised engagement activities with a diverse range of communities, including First Nations people, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTIQ-plus communities, remote and very  
35 remote communities and other groups.

40 The Commission is also committed to engaging with people with a wide range of disability and in a variety of environments, including closed environments, such as prisons and detention centres, group homes, boarding facilities and those experiencing homelessness. More information about this engagement will become available over the coming months.

45 I will shortly provide an overview of how people can make submissions to the Commission, public and private hearings and compulsory notices, but before I do so, I note the Commission published on Friday, 13 September four practice guidelines to inform people about the procedures the Commission will follow. In summary,

Practice Guideline 1 sets out the general guidance about the Commission's procedures, including how to communicate with the Commission, confidentiality, the production of information and hearings. Practice Guideline 2 sets out the way in which the Commission will receive and consider claims of legal professional  
5 privilege.

Practice Guideline 3 sets out general guidance about appearing as a witness before the Commission, and Practice Guideline 4 sets out more detailed guidance about the conduct of hearings, including leave to appear, examine and cross-examine witnesses  
10 and submissions, as well as the production of documents to the Commission. The guidelines are available on the Royal Commission website. I encourage anybody who intends to engage with the Commission or any legal or other representatives to view the guidelines.

15 One of the main ways the Commission will receive information from the public is through submissions. The Commission opened for submissions on 29 July 2019. The majority of submissions received to date are from people with disability and family members, with the balance of the submissions from paid carers and advocates. The main issues raised by the submission thus far are housing, justice and health.  
20 Counsel Assisting and the Commission are grateful for the people who have already had the courage and persistence to tell the Commission of their deeply personal experiences of violence, abuse and exploitation.

To assist people in making a submission, a form is currently available on the  
25 Commission's website, but the form is only a guide and submissions can be structured in any way the person making the submission sees fit. The Commission must recognise that it is often an emotional burden to describe the traumatic experiences in writing. The Commission will be happy to receive submissions in the first language of the person making the submission, including Auslan and Indigenous  
30 languages, and is actively investigating options to receive submissions in video and audio formats. Counsel assisting and the Commission acknowledge the challenges for people with English as a second language in making submissions. The Commission must accept responsibility for ensuring that the Commission is as accessible as possible.  
35

Of course, all submissions received will be individually considered by an officer of the Commission. All submissions will be used to guide and inform the work of the Commission. The Commission welcomes submissions and information from stakeholders and the public at any time, but there are people who may need support  
40 in coming forward. The Commission is working with other government agencies who will be providing the following support.

The Australian Government is funding legal advisory supports to provide legal advice and information to members of the public engaging with the Commission to  
45 enable them to understand their rights and their options. A person does not need to be a formal witness before the Commission to access assistance to the legal advisory support. The support will be independent, trauma-informed and culturally safe. It

will be delivered nationally and will target people with disability, their families and carers from community groups including First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, LGBTQI-plus communities, residents of institutions such as care facilities, prisons and detention centres.

5

From today, people can contact 1800 771 800 to seek initial information about the legal advisory service and how to engage with the Royal Commission. Information about the service is also available from today on the Legal Aid New South Wales website and will shortly be available on the Commission's website. Through the Department of Social Services, DSS, the Australian Government is providing additional funding to current providers of individual advocacy supports. People with disability can continue to access these Commonwealth-funded advocacy supports. The DSS will also fund counselling and referral supports for people with disability, their carers and families. These supports are being funded and administered through agencies external to the Royal Commission.

The Commission knows how vital these supports are and looks forward to them being available as soon as possible. Updates about these supports will be published on the Royal Commission's website, where you can also sign up to the Commission's mailing list to receive regular email updates about the Commission. As the chair has pointed out, the Commission has compulsory powers which it can use to gather information and evidence if necessary. These include the power to issue notices requiring people to produce documents, things or information to the Commission, to provide written statements or to attend and give evidence in person.

25

The Commission does not intend to use these powers to require any action by people with disability. Rather, the Commission may use its powers to obtain documents and other information where necessary from governmental bodies, agencies, commercial organisations and support providers. First steps have already been taken. Last week, the Commission wrote to a substantial number of the largest NDIS providers, putting them on notice that the Commission will shortly issue them with formal notices to produce documents or to give information about the services they provide, complaints, investigations and reporting of incidents of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability in connection with those services and policies and procedures to identify and manage any such incidents.

35

The information gathered by the Commission will assist it to prepare a series of public hearings. The length of each set of hearings will vary depending on the subject matter and the nature of the evidence to be considered. The form of the hearing should be flexible. For example, a hearing considering abuse or violence experienced by First Nations people in remote communities might be conducted differently from a hearing considering the exclusion of children with disability from a mainstream education facility in a large capital city. The Commission expects to hear from witnesses who will give evidence in person at these hearings. The witnesses may be people with disability who have been victims of violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation. Evidence may be given by their families or their friends.

45

The Commission may also hear from carers or representatives of organisations providing support to people with disability, whether in public, private or the not-for-profit sector. The Commission may also call people with expertise on relevant topics to give evidence. The Commission proposes that each hearing will focus on a theme.

5 The Commission has developed themes or domains of inquiry around which to structure its work going forward. These domains will be further developed over time, and new themes may emerge as a result of the hearings, submissions or workshops with stakeholders and the community. At this stage, the domains of inquiry are homes and living, relationships, education and learning, economic  
10 participation, health, justice, individual autonomy, self-determination and the right to the dignity of risk, community participation and geographical challenges.

The Commission has already held a number of workshops to develop these domains of inquiry, including three workshops with representatives from the legal sector, a  
15 criminal justice workshop in Melbourne earlier this month and two First Nations workshops. As I have already mentioned today, Counsel Assisting and the Commission appreciate that there may have been reluctance by some people with disability or their supporters to come forward to share their experiences with us until there are fully operational legal advisory and other support services available. This  
20 means that the Commission's task of preparing and presenting case studies has been somewhat more difficult than if those services had been available earlier.

Nevertheless, the Commission is expecting to hold one or perhaps two public hearings before the end of the year. At this stage, the Commission is focusing on the  
25 domains of Education and Learning and Homes and Living as potential areas for inquiry. In particular, the Commission is looking into the use of restrictive practices; the exclusion of students with disability from the education system; and issues arising from the types of housing available to people with disability, be it in an institutional setting, in the community or otherwise.

30 The Commission welcomes submissions from people with disability, their supporters and advocacy groups about experiences of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability in all contexts and settings. At this stage, the Commission is particularly interested in receiving submissions related to the domains of education  
35 and housing and the specific matters I have just described.

I am sharing this information today to demonstrate that the Royal Commission is open.

40 We – Counsel Assisting and the Commission – encourage those who are willing and able to do so to make submissions by email or by phone. Contact details are on the Royal Commission's website, along with a downloadable submission form which can be used as a guide.

45 The Commission will keep the community informed about its work, including the public hearings. Details of the public hearings will be published on the website before each hearing commences. Transcripts of the public hearings – including

today's ceremonial sitting – will also be published shortly after each hearing. Other news of the Commission, including summaries of workshops, is published regularly on the website and social media.

5 The Royal Commission will likely receive very sensitive information about individuals, who may have experienced trauma. In that sense, there are similarities between the work of this Commission and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. At the Child Abuse Royal Commission, survivors and victims had the option to tell their stories in private session, and that  
10 Commission heard over 8000 stories in this manner. For some survivors, this was the first chance to tell their story to someone in a position of authority. It was their first chance to feel that they had been heard.

The Royal Commissions Act 1902 has now been amended to enable a Royal  
15 Commission to hold 'private sessions' where a regulation is made authorising it to do so. The explanatory memorandum accompanying the bill records that the Government proposes to recommend to the Governor-General that this Royal Commission be permitted to hold private sessions. This is a very important development as it offers people the opportunity to share their experiences with the  
20 Commission in private and in safety.

People who share their experiences in private session will have the same protection as witnesses before the Commission. Recognising the sensitivity of these  
25 experiences, there will be restrictions on the use and disclosure of the information given in those sessions. The material disclosed in private sessions will not be on oath or affirmation, which means it will not be formal evidence received by the Commission. However, private sessions are an important supplementary means for the Commission to gather information. Some people sharing their experiences in  
30 private sessions may be willing, with appropriate support, to give evidence at public hearings. But that will be a choice for them.

Even where information is given in a public hearing, there are options available to the Commission to protect confidential information and the people who are disclosing it. For example, a hearing may be 'closed' particularly when sensitive  
35 evidence is given, for example, by a child. The Commission may make non-publication orders to prevent a person's identity being reported in the media, and the Commission may use pseudonyms when publishing reports of sensitive evidence.

We, Counsel Assisting, affirm the Chair's statement that this Royal Commission has  
40 come about as a result of the tireless advocacy by and on behalf of people with disability over a long period of time. We are, and will be, making every effort to ensure that people with disability are able to engage with us in whatever manner they choose.

45 The Commission's Draft Accessibility Strategy has been published on the website, and the Commission will continue to refine this Strategy to reflect feedback from the disability community and other interested people. The Strategy commits the

Commission to putting people with disability first in everything it does and sets out the following provisional guidelines and principles for accessible engagement for people with disability: enabling people to engage with the Commission in the way that they choose; ensuring that each person is able to make their own decisions about  
5 how they might contribute and participate; overcoming barriers to participation by enabling different modes of engaging with us; and providing additional supports, including transport, interpreters and other specialist disability supports as requested.

10 A simple example of how the Strategy will be implemented is that the Commission intends to visit different regional areas around Australia so that it can engage with the community more readily. The Commission also intends to publish Auslan videos with closed captioning for the information currently on the website, and for new information as it is published. As I have already mentioned, the Commission is also  
15 actively investigating options for receiving submissions by video to enable people to make submissions in Auslan or other languages that they are comfortable with.

The Strategy will also guide how we, Counsel Assisting, run the public hearings. Hearings, like today's hearings, will be close-captioned and will include Auslan interpretation. We will make other arrangements to cater for witnesses' particular  
20 needs, such as taking breaks and having sessions at convenient times of the day. We will also work with witnesses and other participants to understand how we can help them to engage with the Commission in a manner that best meets their needs.

Counsel Assisting and the Commission recognise that, when engaging with the  
25 Commission, people may be reliving traumatic experiences, and that these experiences can have ongoing impacts. To address this, the Commission will adopt a trauma-informed approach when engaging with the community, having regard to the key principles of safety, transparency, empowerment, capacity to collaborate, and cultural safety.  
30

As part of this trauma-informed approach, the Commission has engaged in-house counselling and support staff to provide an escalation point for distressed callers to our phone line; to assist with all community engagements; to provide support to  
35 witnesses at hearings; and to support people at private sessions. Importantly, the in-house counselling and support staff also review the Commission's policies and procedures to ensure all aspects of the Commission's operations are appropriately trauma-informed.

40 The purpose of these services is to ensure that people feel safe and supported when giving evidence or otherwise – or otherwise engaging with us, and that they are not re-traumatised by that process. Of course, people may also use other counselling supports like Beyond Blue or Lifeline if they need extra support.

I have already mentioned today the workshops being run by the Commission with the  
45 legal sector on criminal justice issues, and with First Nations people. These workshops run parallel to the investigative work and hearings of the Commission's legal team.



The purpose of the workshops is for the Commission to engage with experts and stakeholders to identify the key issues for people with disability in particular the domain of inquiry. After the workshops, the Commission will prepare detailed discussion papers setting out issues identified during the workshops and in the work  
5 of the policy and research teams of the Commission, and the Commission will invite people to make submissions in response.

There will also be regular Community Forums to enable members of the public to engage with the Commission in a less formal setting. The first of these forums was  
10 held in Townsville on 9 September 2019, and was attended by around 150 people. There were 14 speakers at the forum, who shared deeply personal stories about their lived experience either as a person with disability or as a parent or advocate for a person with a disability. The Commission intends to hold Community Forums in  
15 other regional and outer metropolitan areas as well in capital cities. Following development of its Indigenous Engagement Strategy, the Commission intends to visit remote communities to ensure the voices of First Nations People in those communities are heard.

The Commission has a genuine desire to listen and learn deeply about the different  
20 needs of each community. While the Commission may not get to every area that wishes to engage with it, the Commission should consult and engage as widely as possible in the time available.

Counsel Assisting and the Commission encourage people with disability, their  
25 families, carers and supporters, the community at large, to contribute to or at least to follow the work of the Commission as it progresses. The Commission has established a website, a 1800 phone number, and an email enquiry address. There is an email subscription list and subscribers will regularly receive updates about the Commission's activities. The Commission has a social media presence, with  
30 Facebook and Twitter accounts, and a YouTube channel.

The Royal Commission provides an unprecedented opportunity, on a national scale, to shine a light on the abuse of people with disability, and to help realise the rights of  
35 people with disability, and to promote a more inclusive society. It is an opportunity for healing and a real step towards justice for people with disability. The Commission has the potential to have a transformational effect on the lives of countless Australians both now and in the future. Every person involved in this Commission is committed to achieve that potential.

40 May it please the Commission.

CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Treston. On behalf of the Commission, may I thank  
45 everybody who has taken the time and trouble to attend the hearing today, and also those who have been following the proceedings remotely, whether viewing or listening to the proceedings. Thank you very much. The Commission will now adjourn.

**MATTER ADJOURNED at 11.42 am INDEFINITELY**

Note: this transcript has been edited to correct errors and an inadvertent omission.