

Embargoed until 11:30am, 15 December 2010

NSW Ombudsman
Special Report to Parliament
Service provision in Bourke and Brewarrina

The NSW Ombudsman Bruce Barbour tabled a special report to Parliament today entitled *Inquiry into service provision to the Bourke and Brewarrina communities*.

Just over half of all juveniles in detention in NSW are Aboriginal. In Western NSW, Aboriginal children make up over 80 percent of detainees. Aboriginal children also make up one third of the more than 17,000 children in out-of-home care.

‘Aboriginal communities in Bourke and Brewarrina approached my office out of frustration’ said the Ombudsman. **‘They did not feel the response to vulnerable children in their communities was adequate, and they did not feel their voice was being heard.’**

We have undertaken a close examination of how community and child protection services are being provided in Bourke and Brewarrina. Are they providing the protection they are designed to? Are they making a difference? Do they need to be improved?

The last few years have seen some progress in the way in which services are being provided to rural and regional communities. There is a large amount of work underway, both at the State and Federal level. There are good programs and assistance. But our work has shown us more needs to be done to convert these initiatives into results.

‘Service provision needs to be more targeted to those who are most vulnerable, it needs to better address the concerns of the communities, and there needs to be a greater effort made to integrate and coordinate the services being provided by different departments and different levels of government’ Mr Barbour said.

‘There have been improvements in these areas, but there is still much more that can be done. For example, it is unhelpful and frustrating for community members to have to sit down with multiple agencies, often discussing the same or similar issues. Government agencies, both State and Federal, need to plan their contact with communities, working together and working smarter.’

While the report focuses on the experiences of the Bourke and Brewarrina communities, its recommendations are relevant to rural and regional communities across the State.

‘The message we are hearing from communities is clear’ said the Ombudsman. **‘Yes, action is being taken, but it is not coordinated and it is not targeted, and as a result it is not delivering the support and the results that communities need. Local needs require a coordinated local response.’**