



MINISTER FOR EDUCATION

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Productivity Commission
Via email: childhood@pc.gov.au

Dear Commissioners

Thank you for taking the time to visit the Northern Territory (NT) to meet with senior officials from the Department of Education and other early childhood education and care stakeholders as part of the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Inquiry.

The NT Government is committed to designing and implementing a contemporary early childhood system that is equitable and accessible to all Territory families through its *Education NT Strategy 2021-2025*. In line with this commitment, the NT welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Productivity Commission ECEC Inquiry, which is attached for your consideration.

The NT Government considers there is an opportunity for governments to significantly improve interactions with existing and planned Australian Government and Territory ECEC policy settings and funding that would enable us as system stewards to better support a more affordable, accessible, equitable and high-quality integrated service.

The current overlap of early years funding and responsibility nationally is challenging to navigate, with varying levels of support provided to services and families across jurisdictions and in different service settings. This notion of equitable service provision for all Australian children, particularly those that are living in remote and very remote locations, experience further disadvantages to access the child care subsidy and high-quality ECEC.

The NT is committed to supporting the development of every child no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face. As a small jurisdiction, the NT is restricted in its provision of services with neither the economies of scale or revenue base to comprehensively provide the solutions that we know is needed. I would encourage your consideration as part of this inquiry in how we can holistically support the needs of thin markets, a thinly spread population and a population with high levels of disadvantages to provide greater equity for all families to access quality ECEC services.

In the broader area of program delivery, particularly in remote communities, the jointly developed Coordinated Investment Framework demonstrates the necessity for a coordinated approach between governments to support the planning, funding and delivery

of services with an overarching vision to improve outcomes for children in the NT. This approach is a direct result of the previous Productivity Commission findings on expenditure on children in the NT.

I would welcome further discussions at the officials' level to support this inquiry. Should you wish to discuss further, please contact Ms Agnes McGrath, Senior Director, Early Years and Primary in the Department of Education:

I look forward to reviewing the draft report in November 2023 and welcome the opportunity for the NT Government to make further contributions to this inquiry.

Yours sincerely

EVA LAWLER

20 JUN 2023