

11 September 2013

The Honourable Mr John Elferink  
Minister for Justice and Attorney-General  
GPO Box 3146  
DARWIN NT 0801

Dear Attorney,

The Commission commends the Northern Territory Government (NTG) on its renewed resolve to tackle domestic violence as stated by Chief Minister Giles in his address to the NT Legislative Assembly on 21 August 2013.

The purpose of this letter is to initiate a discussion across the NT on the best approach to assist victims and reduce domestic and family violence in the NT.

The recent allocation of funding to the Domestic Violence Legal Service (DVLS) for the period 2013-2016 is welcomed as part of this renewed focus on combating domestic violence. This funding will allow the important work of DVLS to continue to provide individual advice and casework for victims of domestic violence, in particular, as well as to participate in law reform, policy and community legal education. The triennial funding program enables the Service to undertake a strategic approach to meet the needs of victims of domestic violence in the Greater Darwin region.

Although there are a number of legal and community services in the NT providing assistance to persons experiencing domestic violence, there are significant gaps in the level of legal and other support available to victims and perpetrators of domestic violence.

Victims are not well served by a system which sees DVOs made to perpetrators without a full explanation and information. The NT prisons are overpopulated by offenders who have breached DVOs.

Given the NTG's strong commitment to addressing domestic violence and the associated personal, social and financial costs to our community, the Commission writes now to support the proposal that the NTG conduct a review of all domestic violence legal and related services in the NT, so as to ensure the best possible distribution and coordination of resources to assist victims experiencing the rising incidence of domestic violence and related harms in the NT.

Such a review could outline the current resources allocated to the services, service delivery parameters, the limitations and the unmet legal need. Such a review might also usefully address support, counselling and education services relating to victims and perpetrators of domestic violence and how these can work together with legal services.

The National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services between the NTG and the Federal Government establishes a forum to consider opportunities for improved coordination and targeting of services between legal assistance service providers with other service providers, within the jurisdiction.

Concerns in relation to gaps in service provision for victims of domestic violence were discussed at the NT Jurisdictional Forum in 2012. Both the NTG and the Commonwealth attend the Jurisdictional forums. The attached paper was a preliminary snapshot of the status of services available and gaps in 2012. There have been some changes in domestic violence legal services since then.

A full review of the Territory and Federal domestic violence legal services is timely. Such a review may also assist the Government in its resolve to tackle the NT's appalling rates of domestic violence by gathering data and facts to consider how we can assist families, including perpetrators, to take responsibility and address their behaviour to break the cycle of domestic violence.

We thank you for your consideration of the issues raised. If further information is required, please do not hesitate to contact Fiona Hussin on 89993000.

Yours faithfully,

**SUZAN COX QC**  
Director