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## Queensland to roll out indigenous welfare reform trial

**AAP** - Friday, December 21, 2007

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The Queensland government will trial indigenous welfare reform in four communities from next year, requiring families to meet basic responsibilities in order to receive payments. Premier Anna Bligh and Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin finalised the agreement in Brisbane today, after 10 days of talks.

With \$48 million in Commonwealth funds, the state government will establish a Family Responsibilities Commission to operate in the Cape York communities of Aurukun, Hopevale, Coen and Mossman Gorge over four years.

Ms Bligh said her government would match the funding, to improve health, education, policing and child safety resources in the region. She told reporters in Brisbane today that it was an historic agreement. "This is a very dramatic change in public policy and the way we administer government services and social security payments," Ms Bligh said. "But we all know that despite the efforts of governments over the years and a lot of well-meaning people, we have not seen the outcomes that we want to see for young indigenous children and indigenous families. "So we have to think differently, we have to think outside the square and we have to work in a very different way."

Ms Macklin said the governments had an "urgent responsibility" to change opportunities in these communities. "If we don't act together in the interests of those children then unfortunately the sort of alcohol abuse, the child abuse, the problems that families are facing, will continue into the next generation," she told reporters. "No Australian wants to see that happen."

The scheme was proposed by the Cape York Institute's Noel Pearson, who joined Ms Bligh and Ms Macklin in Brisbane for today's announcement. Mr Pearson said he had "hoped and prayed" for the commission to be established for a long time. "The problems afflicting my people in Cape York are extremely distressing to leaders and community members from the Cape because our people are, at heart, a loving people," he told reporters.

"A number of problems have combined to make life in the place we love, sometimes a living hell. "Those problems end up taking such a hold over individuals and communities that they become poisons that are stronger than love."

Mr Pearson said the scheme would be better than the federal government's

intervention in the Northern Territory, because it acted only where families weren't providing adequate care. It will require families to meet basic standards - school attendance, care for children, no violent or alcohol-related offences and the terms of their tenancy agreements.

The four communities involved in the trial agreed to do so by majority vote of their councils. In addition to the reforms, Ms Bligh said the state's share of \$50 million in funding for alcohol rehabilitation, announced at yesterday's COAG meeting, would be used to toughen up alcohol management plans in indigenous communities.

She said she would meet indigenous mayors in February, offering them the services if their communities agreed to trial prohibition. The state government will introduce legislation in February to allow the welfare reform trial to begin.

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