



North Queensland Consumer Taskforce

DRAFT

Terms of Reference

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Background/Context

The North Queensland Consumer Taskforce (the Taskforce) is a group of like-minded organisations that have a common interest in consumer wellbeing, especially in relation to vulnerable consumers and predatory traders. The group has developed informally over time and has a fluctuating membership based upon individual projects and changing crossover points for members. The group has been meeting informally for some time and a need has been identified for a more formal structure to allow for future planning and targeting of member activities. Many of the activities undertaken by the Taskforce have required interaction and coordination of members and a more formalised structure will allow both regulators and non-governments organisations (NGO's) to seek support from the various management bodies. The Terms of Reference are structured in such a way that they are flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances and enhance rather than inhibit the operation of the Taskforce.

Function of the Taskforce

The function of the Taskforce is to take responsibility for the issues identified as having an adverse impact on vulnerable consumers. The Taskforce will identify projects that can be undertaken as a group or sub-group, or matters that are best referred to individual members or external parties for action. The Taskforce itself is not a lobby group seeking legislative change but simply a vehicle that allows for more effective application of combined resources to achieve targeted outcomes under existing legislation. The Taskforce also has an obligation to measure outcomes of actions, whether this be objective, subjective, or anecdotal evidence.

Role of the Taskforce

The role of the Taskforce is to:

- take on responsibility for addressing issues that affect vulnerable consumer groups
- ensure the Taskforce scope aligns generally with the role of member organisations
- provide those directly involved in the Taskforce with guidance on legislation and reactive strategies for emerging issues
- ensure effort and expenditure are appropriate to manage stakeholder expectations and achieve realistic outcomes
- address any issue that forms an impediment to effective Taskforce operation



- keep the Taskforce scope under control as emergent issues force changes to be considered
- reconcile differences in opinion and approach, and resolve disputes arising from them
- report on Taskforce progress to higher management levels of member organisations

Role of individual Taskforce members

The role of the individual member of the Taskforce includes:

- understand the strategic implications and outcomes of initiatives being pursued through Taskforce outputs
- appreciate the significance of Taskforce projects for some or all major stakeholders and represent their interests
- be genuinely interested in the initiative and the outcomes being pursued
- be an advocate for Taskforce outcomes
- have a broad understanding of consumer issues and the approaches being adopted or developed by the Taskforce
- be committed to, and actively involved in pursuing Taskforce outcomes

In practice, this means they:

- ensure the requirements of stakeholders are met by the project's outputs
- help balance conflicting priorities and resources
- provide guidance to other Taskforce members and end users of the project's outputs
- consider ideas and issues raised
- review the progress of the project
- check adherence of Taskforce activities to standards of best practice, both within the group and in a wider context



General

Membership

The membership of the Taskforce will be in two parts. There will be a core group and an ancillary group.

The core group will consist of representatives from each of the following:

- Indigenous Consumer Assistance Network (ICAN)
- Qld Office of Fair Trading (OFT)
- Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC)
- Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC)

The ancillary group will consist of representatives from:

- Department of Social Services (DSS)
- Energy and Water Ombudsman Qld (EWOQ)
- Cairns Community Legal Centre (CCLC)
- Shelter Housing Action Cairns (SHAC)

Other members will be invited to participate in Taskforce activities from time to time and, by agreement among existing members, may become permanent members of the Taskforce.

Observers may be invited to Taskforce meetings or activities from time to time but those identified as observers will not directly participate in taskforce decision making.

Convenor

The ICAN Services Manager shall be responsible for convening and conducting scheduled meetings, although this role may be undertaken by another member if the Services Manager is not available. The convenor of Taskforce scheduled meetings shall be responsible for notifying members of meeting dates at least one week prior to any scheduled meeting.

Sub groups of the Taskforce may meet from time to time by mutual agreement to manage particular Taskforce projects.

Agenda Items

All Taskforce agenda items must be forwarded to the ICAN Services Manager two working days prior to the next scheduled meeting.



The Taskforce meeting agenda, with attached meeting papers will be distributed at least one working day prior to the next scheduled meeting.

The Convenor has the right to refuse to list an item on the formal agenda, but members may raise an item under 'Other Business' if necessary and as time permits.

Minutes & Meeting Papers

The minutes of each Taskforce meeting will be prepared by the meeting convenor.

Full copies of the Minutes, including attachments, shall be provided to all Taskforce members no later than ten working days following each meeting.

By agreement of the Taskforce, out-of-session decisions will be deemed acceptable. Where agreed, all out-of-session decisions shall be recorded in the minutes of the next scheduled meeting.

Frequency of Meetings

The Taskforce shall meet quarterly as a minimum but additional meetings may be scheduled to manage particular projects as required.

Proxies to Meetings

Members of the Taskforce shall nominate a proxy to attend a meeting if the member is unable to attend.

The convenor will be informed of the substitution at least one working day prior to the scheduled nominated meeting where this is possible.

The nominated proxy shall provide relevant comments/feedback, of the Taskforce member they are representing, to the attended meeting.

Attendance is acceptable either in person or by electronic means such as teleconference or Skype.

Quorum Requirements

A minimum of three core members of the Taskforce is required for the meeting to be recognised as an authorised meeting for the recommendations or resolutions to be valid.

The quorum must contain at least three member from the core membership.

