

Palm Island

Palm Island is approximately 70 kilometres north north-east of Townsville. The community recorded an estimated resident population of about 2,160 people at 30 June 2007. Palm Island recorded an average annual population decrease from 2002 to 2007 of 1.3 per cent.

The community is made up of two primary groups: Manbarra (traditional owners) and the larger group Bwgcolman, which incorporates all the other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families/clans.

Services to the community

Community services on Palm Island include the Joyce Palmer Health Service, an ambulance service, Home and Community Care, the Kootana Women's Centre, Ferdy's Haven - an alcohol and drug rehabilitation centre, the Community Justice Group, a visiting Magistrates Court, a Catholic primary school, the Bwgcolman Community School, the Palm Island Senior Campus and a TAFE College, PCYC, Coolgaree CDEP adult education courses, child safety services and support, and family and domestic violence services. There are 16 police officer positions on Palm Island, together with a Queensland Corrective Services Probation and Parole service.

The Queensland Government also provides funding support for emergency support and accommodation, a cell-watch program, child care services, activities for young people, diversionary services and a sport and recreation officer.

An Alcohol Management Plan commenced on Palm Island on 19 June 2006 (see Table 1). The Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council lost its licence to operate the Coolgaree Bay Hotel on 1 December 2008 as part of the alcohol reforms for Indigenous communities. The Palm Island canteen has now been closed.

The Government Champions for Palm Island are Linda Apelt, Director-General, Department of Communities and Disability Services Queensland, and Mal Grierson, Director-General, Department of Public Works.



Key initiatives

The Palm Island Community Company has been established to improve the delivery of social services and to provide business support and advice to non-government organisations and the community. The primary shareholders are the Queensland Government, Australian Government and the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council. The Australian Government is yet to nominate its directors to the board.

The Independent Chairperson, Company Secretary, Queensland Government nominees, Council nominees, Community Nominee and Development Manager, have all been appointed.

The company will partner with existing non-government organisations on Palm Island to deliver Family Support Hub Services, disability services and the Safe Haven Service.

The senior phase of learning (post Year 10) is in its second year of operation. The program focuses on students developing work related competencies and strengthening their literacy and numeracy in vocationally oriented courses.

In 2008 there were 72 enrolments for Year 11 and 12 equivalent studies.

The Department of Public Works has completed the construction of the first of two new government offices, the first includes a court facility. The second building is under construction and is due for completion around early April 2009 – depending on weather. A number of Palm Island community members work on the project and local art will be incorporated in both buildings.

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The Department of Natural Resources and Water is working with Council and Traditional Owners on a range of land management arrangements including, improved surveying information, cultural heritage issues and town planning initiatives. The parties are also working closely on developing an Indigenous Land Use Agreement which should address the land management and native title issues in respect of future development

The Department of Public Works is also preparing a CBD Masterplan for Council. This project is linking with a study being undertaken by the Australian Government on the viability of a new Retail Precinct for Palm Island. The Retail Precinct feasibility study should be completed early in 2009, with the CBD Masterplan approximately one month later. The Australian Government has recently secured Council ratification to progress with a range of initiatives included in their agreement with Council from October 2007 including a new subdivision for additional residential sites.

All parties signed off on the Palm Island Joint Emergency Services Facility including land allocation and funding. As part of the alcohol reform process, the Queensland Government and the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council resolved to promote the wellbeing of local residents, particularly children, through community awareness of the health and the negative impacts of excessive alcohol use.

Queensland Fire and Rescue also provided a range of training to people from the community including: fire management, bushfire preparedness, community education, road crash rescue and applied first aid.

The Strong Community Life (SCL) program participated in the Palm Island Rodeo on 15 November 2008. Give-aways including shopping bags promoting the sly-grog hotline were popular with the crowd. The SCL team will return to Palm Island in the first half of 2009 to run the full program.

In November 2008, the government announced that there would be no change to the existing carriage limit for Palm Island at this time. The maximum amount of alcohol a person can have in the Palm Island Shire will continue to be 11.25 litres (one x 30 can carton) of light or mid-strength beer. The package of additional services to support alcohol reform in the Palm Island Shire includes health treatment (drug and alcohol) and diversionary services.

The Palm Island Community Company has received \$30,000 per annum over three years to implement the Alcohol Reforms program. The service commenced on 1 September 2008 to coordinate alcohol free events on Palm Island and provide support to existing services on Palm Island such as personal support to the Men's group and linking people into Queensland Health Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Services, Ferdy's Haven and diversion services to help people to live sober in the community.

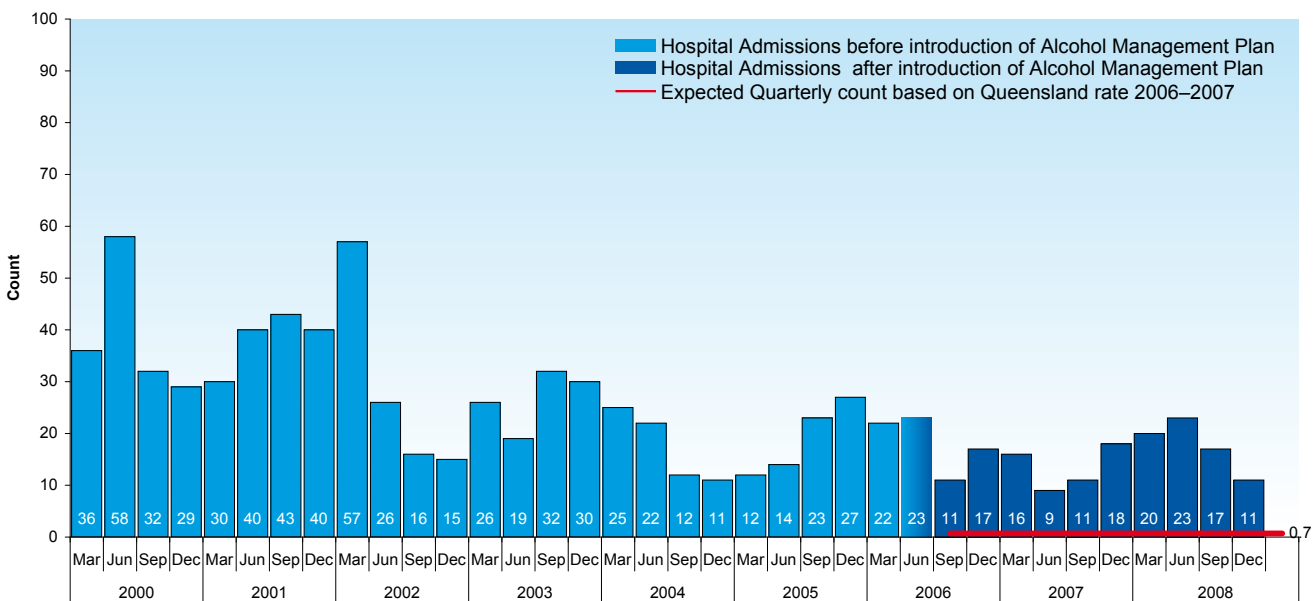
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Hospital Admissions for Assault

Since the March quarter 2000 there has been considerable variability in quarterly counts for assault hospitalisations of people from Palm Island. Counts ranged from nine up to 58 per quarter. Quarterly counts over the two years to 31 December 2008 ranged from 9 in

the June quarter 2007 up to 23 in the June quarter 2008. There was an average of 17.8 hospitalisations for assault reported per quarter for people from Palm Island over the 12 months to 31 December 2008. This compares with an expected count of 0.7 per quarter (estimated by applying the 2006-07 Queensland rate to the population count of Palm Island in 2007).

Figure 49: Quarterly number of hospital admissions for assault, March quarter 2000 to December quarter 2008, Palm Island (a)



(a) These data are limited due to a range of factors. They must be read with reference to the notes at the end of this report.
Source: Queensland Health, unpublished data

Persons Convicted (breaches of section 168B of the *Liquor Act 1992*)

Since the introduction of the Alcohol Management Plan, there has been a total of 22 persons convicted of 22 breaches of alcohol carriage restrictions in Palm Island. In the December quarter 2008, one person was convicted (individuals convicted are not necessarily residents of the community). Convictions on Palm Island may have been impacted by a legal challenge over the validity of the Alcohol Management Plan that was active during the quarter.

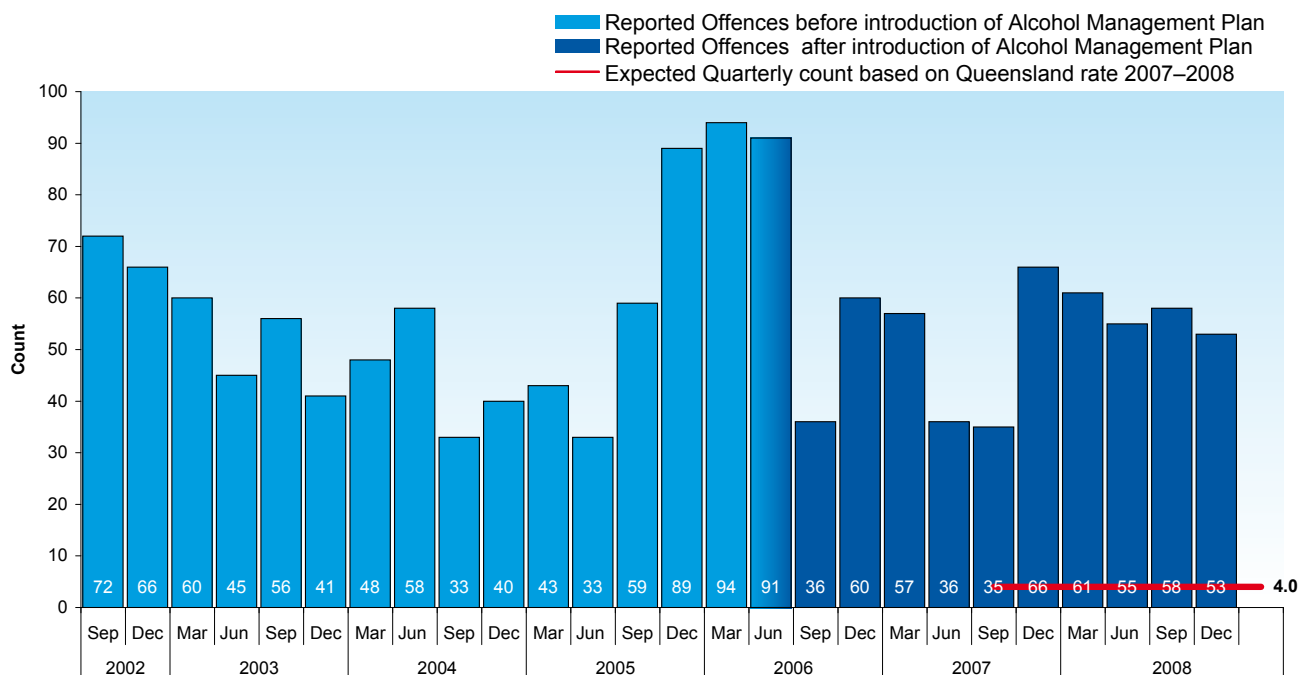
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Reported Offences Against the Person

While still high, numbers of reported offences against the person on Palm Island appear to have been relatively stable over the four quarters to 31 December 2008 (ranging from 53 up to 61 per quarter). There was an average of

56.8 offences against the person reported per quarter on Palm Island over the four quarters to 31 December 2008. This compares with an expected count of 4.0 per quarter (estimated by applying the 2007-08 Queensland rate to the population count of Palm Island in 2007).

Figure 50: Quarterly number of reported offences against the person, September quarter 2002 to December quarter 2008, Palm Island



(a) These data are limited due to a range of factors. They must be read with reference to the notes at the end of this report. Source: Queensland Police Service, unpublished data

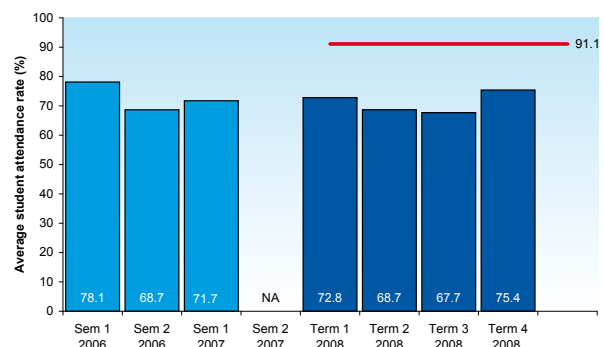
Child Safety

In the December quarter 2008, 17 Palm Island children were subject to a substantiated notification of harm and 11 Palm Island children were admitted to finalised child protection orders.

School Attendance

In term four 2008, the average student attendance rate at Bwgcolman Community School, Palm Island was 75.4 per cent. This was the highest term attendance rate achieved this year.

Figure 51: Average student attendance rate, preparatory to year 10, semester 1 2006 to term 4 2008, Bwgcolman Community School (a)



(a) These data are limited and must be read with reference to the notes at the end of this report. Source: Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts, unpublished data