

# Aboriginals triple State death rate

THE death rate in Far Northern Aboriginal communities was three times the State average, according to an Aboriginal Co-Ordinating Council report released yesterday.

The 107-page report will be submitted to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and includes 211 recommendations for action to prevent further Aboriginal deaths in custody and to generally improve conditions on Aboriginal communities.

The report says the overall death rate for Queensland was 6.81 per 1000 people in 1986 and 7.05 in 1987.

Figures for the period July 1986 to June 1987 published in the report show the death rate in the Aboriginal communities of Doomadgee, Yarrabah, Aurukun and Wujal Wujal was 22.39 per 1000 people.

This ranged from 27.11 per 1000 at Doomadgee, four times the Queensland rate, to 19.61 at Wujal Wujal.

In releasing the submission before about 50 Far Northern Aboriginal community and government representatives at the Pacific International Hotel in Cairns, the Member for Leichhardt, Mr John Gayler, said: "Here we are coming to the end of the 20th century where Aboriginal deaths account for almost three times the deaths in our European community. This cannot be tolerated."

The report said another major concern was the difference in average life expectancies between Aboriginals in communities studied and that of Queenslanders.

"On average, Aboriginal people from these communities have only 60 per cent of the lifespan of their Queensland counterparts to look forward to," the report says.

Written by ACC secretar-

iat director Ms Barbara Miller, in consultation with Aboriginal communities, the submission suggested a permanent body be set up to oversee the recommendations of the Royal Commission.

The commissioner, Mr Lew Wyvill, QC, who conducted hearings into several Far Northern Aboriginal deaths in custody, said he was pleased with the submission's recommendations.

Mr Gayler said while he did not agree with the submission in its entirety, he supported the implementation of most of the recommendations and said everyone should be made aware of the facts.

The submission included the following major recommendations concerning Aboriginal community policing:

- An assessment needed to be made of whether Queensland Aboriginal communities were over-policed;
- Aboriginal councils should sit on interview panels to select State police who wish to work on Aboriginal communities;
- The Police Department should set up a single Aboriginal unit to have responsibility for Aboriginal policing throughout Queensland; and
- Drunkenness should be decriminalised and sobering up centres used instead of jailing drunks overnight.

The next section claimed because Aboriginal people were powerless compared to whites, they had turned their rage inward, resulting in suicide, self-injury, homicide, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect and alcoholism. The final section looked at Aboriginals and the justice system, quoting the high rate of crime by Aboriginals compared to Queensland averages.



• Pictured at yesterday's meeting which released the Aboriginal Co-Ordinating Council report are ACC secretariat director, Ms Barbara Miller, and Hopevale councillor and the meeting chairman, Mr Cedric Deeral.