

## Legal services in Queensland's north 'in limbo' awaiting details of funding restoration

ABC North Qld By Nathalie Fernbach

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**Queensland community legal services have welcomed Federal Attorney-General George Brandis' announcement that funding to community legal services will not be cut, but remain in the dark about the detail.**

A 30 per cent cut to Federal Government funding of the sector was due to take affect from July 1, but today the Government announced it will restore \$55.7 million to the sector over three years, including \$16.7 million for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services.

"[They] have been waiting and hoping that the Government would see their point of view and we have done that and delivered for them," Mr Brandis told ABC's AM program.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Womens' Legal Services NQ is hopeful the reversal will save their Palm Island service which would have been closed under the cuts.

The service's principal solicitor, Cathy Pereira, said as yet the sector has had no confirmation as to when they will find out which services will have funding restored.

"Everybody is in limbo at this stage," Ms Pereira said.

"All of the community legal centres are now waiting to hear how the change in the funding environment will affect them."

"We are hoping that this will happen as quickly as possible, obviously, so that we know where we stand by the time July 1 rolls around, the beginning of the funding year."

LawRight Townsville had started to wind down their activities ahead of their likely closure on July 1.

Principal solicitor David Maunsell said as LawRight's north Queensland office was funded under a specific grant, it is still unsure of its future.

"It is a welcome announcement, [but] it is important to note that it is a restoration of funding."

Mr Maunsell said ongoing financial uncertainty makes running community legal services more difficult.

He said funding for the sector needs to be bipartisan and ongoing.

"The Government should be making decisions much earlier in the cycle as to what it is going to do with funding, and have much more consistency and predictability," Mr Maunsell said.



**PHOTO:** Legal staff (L-R) Babette Doherty, Cathy Pereira and Jessica Henry welcome the funding restoration. (ABC North Queensland: Nathalie Fernbach)

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**424** domestic violence matters

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"We have bipartisanship on the need for medical services. There should be the same sort of bipartisan approach to basic legal services.

"It should be a fundamental requirement of Government. It shouldn't wax and wane depending on which Government is in or out."

**Topics:** law-crime-and-justice, community-organisations, domestic-violence, women, townsville-4810, palm-island-4815, brisbane-4000, mount-isa-4825

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