

INQUIRY INTO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SECTOR IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Lord Howe Island Community Preschool

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To the Honourable Members of Parliament,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion around early childhood education and care. This submission draws on my lived experience managing early childhood services in a remote and unique setting—Lord Howe Island, a World Heritage-listed community over 600 kilometres from the NSW mainland.

While the natural beauty of our island is undeniable, the logistical and operational challenges of delivering early childhood education in a very remote setting are significant and often overlooked in mainstream funding and policy models.

Key Challenges:

1. Staffing and Workforce Security

Access to qualified educators is severely limited. Isolation, housing shortages, cost of living, and a lack of professional support networks make recruitment and retention difficult. Despite this, we are held to the same workforce expectations and regulatory ratios as metropolitan services—without the same access to a pool of relief or specialist staff..

2. Operational Limitations Under Rigid Frameworks

We operate within the NQF, NQS, and EYLF with integrity, but the frameworks do not always flex to the realities of a one-room service where educators clean, teach, observe, and report—often outside paid contact hours. Funding models need to reflect the broader roles staff are taking on in small, remote services. The committee, current funding and parents cannot afford to pay for the rent and the full time wage of 3 educators.

3. Equity of Access for Children with Additional Needs

Without on-island allied health support, it's challenging to deliver timely, inclusive care for children with emerging or diagnosed needs. We're navigating complex requirements from the Department without the professional scaffolding available to larger or urban-based services. This places undue pressure on staff and families.

4. Administrative Burden in Underserved Regions

Administrative and compliance requirements are disproportionately burdensome in small-scale services with minimal back-office support. Waiver applications, funding acquittals, QIPs, and reporting structures are not tailored to services with limited personnel or connectivity.

A Call for Realistic, Responsive Solutions

What we need is not less accountability—but smarter systems that recognise and support the unique circumstances of very remote early childhood settings:

- Targeted, flexible funding that acknowledges the additional costs and staffing and providing housing accommodation. These are the complexities of remote service delivery.
- Regional workforce strategies with tailored incentives, accommodation support, and professional development for educators in remote areas.
- Simplified compliance processes and proactive Departmental support that meets services where they are—geographically and operationally.
- Consistent access to inclusion support, especially where allied health access is limited or non-existent.

These changes won't just help one service. They will help dozens of services across regional and remote Australia that are delivering vital early education under extraordinary conditions. It is time policy recognised that remoteness is not just a matter of geography—but of access, equity, and sustainability.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to public service and to the children, educators, and families who deserve a fair start—no matter their postcode.

Yours sincerely,
Chelsea Holden
President, Lord Howe Island Community Preschool
Volunteer Parent