

Indigenous Driver Licensing Program

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About us



The Indigenous Driver Licensing Program is an initiative of Queensland Transport which emerged after a number of studies showed an overrepresentation of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders jailed for licensing offences.

The program aims to reduce:

- Indigenous licensing offences
- road trauma
- deaths and injuries caused by unsafe driving.

Queensland Transport manages the program and is supported by our partners from a number of state government departments and institutions.

What we do

Drivers and learners in remote Indigenous communities cannot easily get to a Queensland Transport Customer Service Centre. Instead, we take the service to them with a mobile driver licensing unit, known in communities as 'the licensing mob'. Indigenous driving examiners and customer service officers, who know the cultures, travel to remote communities in north Queensland and the Torres Strait to deliver licensing services and road safety information.

Having a licence and driving legally means being able to get to work, to health services, education, visiting and helping your family and going to social events.



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Where we've been



From January to June 2008, the mobile Driver Licensing Unit has:

- issued 412 licenses
- renewed 70 licenses
- held another 57 written tests with pass results but with licenses not issued yet due to payment or identity document delays.



Driving examiners Norah Bagiri and William Daddow



Driving Examiner William Daddow with a client in Napranum

Licenses change lives in Pompuraaw

A visit to Pompuraaw got off to a sizzling start when the licensing mob put on a barbecue and gave an information session to their audience of about 60. Over the next few days, they helped people with birth certificate applications, renewed licenses and held learner and truck licence tests. Among the successful learners were a young man, Joseph, a grandmother, Mary, and another woman, Annette.

On the unit's return visit three weeks later they were met by Joseph with a huge beaming smile. He now had a job on council's road gang.

Mary had a different reason to be pleased with her licence. Now she could travel with her granddaughter

to Toowoomba for the start of the boarding school term. Thanks to her learner licence, Mary had a formal identity document and felt able to buy a plane ticket. Many people would be surprised to learn that many Indigenous people feel they cannot catch a plane because of lack of identity documents.

Nearly all councils need their staff to have a driver licence. Annette wanted to apply for a filing job but she did not have a licence. So off she went to the licensing unit and she is now a very happy, employed filing clerk with council.

Pompuraaw Council should be thanked for taking on learners. Council can help these learners build up driving experience toward an open licence. This will mean a few more legal, safer drivers are examples for the whole community.

Queensland Transport wants every driver to be a safe and responsible driver for life

Meet two of the team



Michelle Scott is from the Ghunghanghi clan group and grew up in Yarrabah Aboriginal community south-east of Cairns. Michelle describes her role as a link between Indigenous communities and Queensland Transport. One of her first tasks was to establish advisory groups to build trust and have a say in how to deliver Queensland Transport's services to suit their community. When the licensing team arrives everyone is comfortable talking about things like payments or special cultural or kinship issues.

"I just love hanging out with my mob," Michelle says.

"It keeps me grounded and gives me strength and purpose.

"Working in an office, one can become distant from the realities of being Aboriginal in a remote community."

Promoting road safety is also an important part of Michelle's job.

"I want to work with communities to develop road safety campaigns tailored to their specific problems like driving without seat belts, or on damaged roads out to the homelands after the wet season."

"I just love hanging out with my mob"

"Having a licence is like being given a ticket to an improved life"

Tracey Zahnleiter is a driver examiner and the newest member of the mobile team. Tracey, an ex high school teacher, has spent many years working and living in Indigenous communities in Cape York.

"I love working in remote areas and with Indigenous people," she said. "I want to make things more equitable and make sure everyone has access to Queensland Transport's services.

"Getting a licence makes them so proud of their achievement."

Tracey brought a valuable qualification to the team – assessing for truck licenses. In and near remote communities, driving trucks is one of the few employment opportunities commonly available, especially with mines opening on the cape.





Yorke Island written tests in progress

Yorke Island

When the team visited Yorke Island (Masig) in April, they served about 150 customers over three days. That's about half the permanent population wanting the full range of licensing services, including truck licenses.

The licensing mob is used to being flexible in different situations. On busy Yorke Island they were working outdoors in the town square. One written test had about 30 hopeful applicants. (Group testing is usual and culturally preferable.) At one stage driving examiner Norah Bagiri was presenting a test while happily holding the baby so mum could focus on road rules.

Community Police Officer, Gabriel Nai said it gave them hope when they heard that Queensland Transport was coming.

"When we pull them up because they haven't got a licence, most of them tell me it is too expensive," he said.

Getting a licence in the Torres Strait usually means travelling to Thursday Island. From Yorke Island it costs almost \$1,000. If you don't pass the test, you have to make another trip.



Driving examiner Norah Bagiri helps out with baby-sitting while presenting a licence test

Improving our service

Over the past few months a review of the unit's operations has improved services such as:

- More time spent with individuals, yarning and getting to know each other, explaining and helping with paperwork so that each customer's business is completed, as much as possible, within one visit.
- Follow-up visits scheduled two to three weeks later to complete outstanding business.
- Capacity to assess truck licence applicants.
- Community advisory groups progressively being set up.
- Improvements to community information kits and publications tailored to Indigenous learners.
- Saving travelling time and costs and reducing wet season delays by basing a fully equipped 4WD vehicle at Weipa.

Contact us

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Queensland Transport acknowledges and appreciates its partners and supporting institutions: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils and communities, Queensland Police Service, Department of Justice and Attorney-General, Queensland Corrective Services, Department of Communities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Queensland University of Technology – CARRSQ, James Cook University, TAFE Queensland, Queensland Catholic Education, Townsville, Department of Emergency Services, Department of Local Government, Sport & Recreation