

**DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

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Our Ref: DCFD2014/3547

Dr Howard Bath
Children's Commissioner
Office of the Children's Commissioner
PO Box 40598
CASUARINA NT 0811

Dear Dr Bath

RE: YOUR CONCERNS REGARDING SEXUAL EXPLOITATION RATES

In your last annual report released in October 2013, you expressed concern with the continuing decrease in the level of reported and investigated sexual abuse and sexual exploitation cases in the Northern Territory.

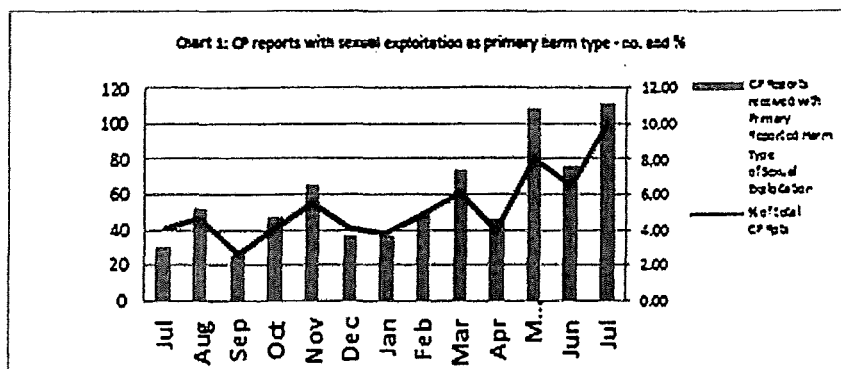
In response to your concerns, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) undertook a program of analysis and discussion to explore this issue. This revealed that concerns about sexual exploitation where the perpetrators were unknown, were incorrectly being recorded as neglect matters. This was based on the misinterpretation of the "parental act or omission" rule which was leading staff to classify harm types based on the parent or caregivers involvement in the harm.

This misinterpretation was addressed through training, engagement with the providers of the Structured Decision Making tool, and a new policy direction issued by the Executive Director responsible for Central Intake in May 2014.

A short analysis of practice has now been conducted following this corrective action. The findings highlight that there has been a clear break in the low numbers of recorded sexual exploitation occurring in the same month that the corrective action was taken.

In the three months prior to May 2014, there were roughly 55 notifications per month recorded with the sexual exploitation harm type. This represented roughly 5 percent of all notifications. In the three months following the corrective action, there were roughly 100 notifications per month recorded, representing 8 percent of all notifications. A table of child protection reports with sexual exploitation as primary harm type is listed below for your information.

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DCF is also seeing a significant increase in the number of matters being substantiated with a sexual exploitation harm type. Prior to May 2014, there was 10 substantiated matters in the quarter (3.3 per month). Following May 2014, there have been 22 substantiated matters (7.3 per month). This is a near doubling of notifications and substantiations due to clarification of a policy interpretation.

Given that the changes have occurred in May 2014, I anticipate that your annual review of figures for 2013-14 will again show an overall low proportion of sexual exploitation for the financial year. I also suspect that the figures for 2014-15 will show a significant rise in rates on the basis of the changes that have been made. It is therefore important that you understand the practice and policy issues that have and will produce this result.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please contact me on telephone (08) 8999 2815 or via email at luke.twyford@nt.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Luke Twyford
A/Executive Director
Professional Practice
 17/09/2014