Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to start this presentation by firstly acknowledging the traditional owners on whose country we meet today and pay my respects to all elders (Indigenous and Non Indigenous) past and present.

Today, I would to share with you some of the strategic initiatives that the Queensland Government is doing at a policy and practical level to close the gap in life outcomes between Indigenous and non Indigenous peoples of Queensland.
The Queensland Government has many strategic initiatives which are aimed at “closing the gap” for Indigenous people in health, education, skilling and employment. One group of Indigenous men and women who can take advantage of these strategies are those who are in the justice system.

There continues to be over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system and therefore a need to address the underlying issues.

20 years have passed since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody report and its 339 recommendations. That report also said that only through addressing the underlying causes for this over representation, would there be any long term reduction in the levels of Indigenous people in the justice system.

The Queensland Anti-Discrimination Commission in their submission to the draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Strategy in May 2011 wrote that both the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the more recent nationwide closing the gap strategy recognise that only when education, health, housing, and employment needs are adequately addressed, will the levels of disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people be remedied.

Minister Pitt, the state member for Mulgrave also said in a speech in May this year – “it is about getting back to basics and looking at the underlying causes of crime – and they are issues that relate to poverty, alcohol and drug misuse, employment, health, housing and education”.

We remain determined, as a government to continue to provide practical responses and to come up with sensible and workable solutions to meet the justice needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

For me standing here today and going back over the same ground is discouraging, but at the same time it makes me hopeful for the future.

Increasing the skills and qualifications of Indigenous people is crucial to taking advantage of the wealth and opportunities generated by Queensland’s long-term economic growth, particularly the massive investment in the resources sector particularly in mining and Coal Seam Gas and the reconstruction of areas of the State affected by floods and Cyclone Yassi.

The Queensland Government’s *Skilling Queenslanders for Work* initiative helps the most disadvantaged job seekers in the community obtain skills and real work experience. Currently, 32 per cent of participants in this initiative are Indigenous people.

In addition, 67 per cent of Indigenous participants had found other jobs or were undertaking further training a year after leaving *Skilling Queenslanders for Work*.

Indigenous VET students represent 5.8 per cent of all Queensland VET students, which is significant given that the proportion of Queensland’s total population who are Indigenous, that is 3 per cent.

As at March 2011, there were 13,909 Indigenous students enrolled in vocational education in Queensland, 16 per cent higher than a year ago.
and the enrolment of Indigenous 15-19 year old students was 14 per cent higher.

Encouraging more Indigenous Queenslanders to undertake a higher level VET qualification is proving to be a successful strategy.

In 2010 - 11, the number of Indigenous students enrolling in a Certificate IV level course or higher is 39.6 per cent more than a year ago.

In addition, the number of Indigenous students undertaking a school-based traineeship is 20 per cent higher than a year ago.

The Queensland Government has established an $83 million Queensland Natural Disaster Jobs and Skills Package to support Queensland communities, businesses and industry to recover from the recent floods and Cyclone Yassi.

The Government Apprenticeship Program component of the Package aims for 20 per cent of apprentices employed through the program, to be Indigenous.

Has any of these initiatives assisted Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system – possibly not would be my thought.

The Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011 states:

- Indigenous people continue to be over-represented in the criminal justice system, as both young people and adults. The early involvement of young people in the criminal justice system puts them at much higher risk of further involvement as adults.
- Poverty, unemployment, low levels of education, having a parent previously or currently in custody, and lack of access to social services are associated with high crime rates and high levels of imprisonment.

Further, the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011 states:

- After adjusting for age differences (young people and adults), Indigenous people were imprisoned at 14 times the rate for non-Indigenous people in 2010.

- The imprisonment rate increased by 59 per cent for Indigenous women and by 35 per cent for Indigenous men between 2000 and 2010.

- Indigenous juveniles were detained at 23 times the rate for non-Indigenous juveniles at 30 June 2009.

- The Indigenous juvenile detention rate increased from 318 per 100 000 juveniles in 2001 to 420 per 100 000 juveniles in 2008, but fell sharply to 365 per 100 000 juveniles in 2009.

Offenders appearing in a **Murri Court** (Queensland) had lower rates of absconding subject to warrant than the same Murri Court participants appearing in a mainstream Magistrates or Children’s Court. However, appearing for sentence in the Murri Court had no impact on reoffending or the seriousness of offending.
The Draft Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Strategy 2011 – 2014 aims to improve community safety and reduce offending and reoffending in Indigenous communities in urban, regional and remote Queensland.

Employment and economic development will play a significant role in preventing crime and reducing reoffending.

Some of the key proposals in the Justice Strategy include:

- A targeted Participate in Prosperity program to provide intensive assistance to Indigenous participants facing multiple barriers in finding work;

- Supporting Indigenous Queenslanders through employment arising from the Queensland Natural Disasters Jobs and Skills package; and

- Developing partnerships with industry to deliver training and jobs to meet local needs and supporting young people at risk of offending through an Active Trails project.

The **Active Trails** project was first implemented in South East Queensland and resulted in a high proportion of Indigenous young people gaining skills and finding permanent employment.

Offending rates in the area dropped whilst Active Trails was implemented. The draft Justice Strategy proposes a new Active Trails
project which will assist at risk young people particularly in the Kingaroy/Cherbourg region.

A new *Jails to Jobs* program is proposed that will see 200 *Indigenous adults* leaving prison each year immediately commence traineeships or employment through initiatives such as Skilling Queenslanders for Work and the Indigenous Business Development program.

**Learning Earning Active Places (LEAP)**

To achieve the close the gap targets in health education, employment and housing, state-wide, a concerted effort is required by government in partnership with the Indigenous peoples and communities and the private sector, to improve outcomes across all these building blocks for Indigenous people in urban and regional Qld where around 78 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live.

The Queensland Government aims to focus more on government effort in urban and regional areas with a new Strategy named *LEAP: learning earning active places*.

The *LEAP* — includes a range of across government actions to improve health, employment, education and housing opportunities in these locations.

Of the 20 across government actions in the strategy, 10 are related to employment and economic participation as the Queensland Government is committed to getting more Indigenous people into the workforce.
As you all know, getting and keeping a job is the best way to overcoming socio-economic disadvantage, build self esteem, enhance emotional and social wellbeing, and enhance social inclusion and active participation.

As part of the urban and regional strategy, access to existing employment and economic participation initiatives will be improved in urban and regional areas.

These include Project 2800 an initiative aimed at providing an additional 2800 public sector employment opportunities for Indigenous Queenslanders by 30 June 2013 and through Indigenous participation in the Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative.

Further, The National VET Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC) recently released Equity Blueprint 2011-2016, *Creating Futures: Achieving Potential through Vocational Education and Training (VET)*, is a comprehensive analysis of the VET system from an equity perspective.

It sets out the policy direction for disadvantaged learners across the system for the next five years (2011-2016). It highlights the VET systems and processes which, if reformed, will make real differences to the lives and futures of disadvantaged Indigenous Queenslanders, while making the VET system stronger and sustainable.

The department’s Indigenous VET Initiatives will play a key role in working in partnership with NVEAC to implement the reforms in Queensland to ensure Indigenous Queensland VET learners develop
and achieve their individual pathway of social inclusion, education, training and employment.

What can you do to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage?

- Find out what your role and responsibilities are: re-evaluate
- Ask yourself: Are you doing the best you can to closing the gap?
- Be respectful of the Indigenous communities and people you are working with.
- Follow Protocols.
- Develop Partnerships.
- Ensure you use culturally appropriate communication, negotiation, liaison and consultation processes.
- Stay Positive and Strong: We need to work together.

*Ladies and gentlemen I thank you for listening.*