



**Government  
of South Australia  
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of South Australia**

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Minister for Child Protection

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**BY EMAIL: SUPPORT@CFC-SA.ORG.AU**

Dear Ms Endacott and Ms Hender,

Thank you for your letter on 6 January 2022 to the Premier. The Premier has asked me to respond on his behalf.

I appreciate you taking the time to write and articulate your views on the independent inquiry into foster and kinship carers as well as the appointment of Dr Fiona Arney. I have sought to address the matters you have raised.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge your significant contribution to the community through your leadership of the peak body for foster and kinship carers in South Australia. This government deeply values the role of carers in providing a loving home to some of our most vulnerable children and young people and we appreciate CF&KC's role in providing support and advocacy on their behalf.

The Government is confident that Dr Arney's considerable experience and expertise in child protection reform should provide the community with assurance of her independence and expertise and that outcomes of the inquiry will be sensible, practicable and result in genuine improvements for foster and kinship carers.

It is also important to note that a number of significant Australian and international inquiries into child protection were conducted by highly regarded academics and subject matter experts. By way of example, the UK's Munro Review of Child Protection; the Inquiry into the Child Protection System in the Northern Territory led by Professor Bamblett, Dr Roseby and Dr Bath; and Professor Davis' independent review into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People in Out of Home Care in NSW.

By way of background, Dr Arney was appointed based on her significant national and international experience in child protection and child protection reform:

- Dr Arney has served as independent Professorial Fellow to the Board of Inquiry into the Northern Territory Child Protection System, the Royal Commission into the South Australian Child Protection System, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory.
- Dr Arney has also served as a member of independent oversight bodies including child death review committees and reform monitoring committees, and she was the Chair of the South Australian Council for the Care of Children whose role included legislative review and monitoring, providing independent advice to Government, and promoting the rights of children.
- Dr Arney has extensive experience in oversight and independent evaluation of child protection reform relating to the recruitment, retention, and support of foster carers, including the re-design of complaints and support mechanisms for foster carers and kinship carers.
- Dr Arney has won awards for her service to research, reform and advocacy including for her contributions to child health and development, science and innovation, community engagement, policy impact and women in leadership.

Dr Arney was formally the Director for the Australian Centre for Child Protection when it was a member of the External Expert Consortium (EEC). The EEC was engaged by the former government to provide independent research and evaluation to support the reform of the child protection system following the Child Protection Systems Royal Commission. The EEC comprised of leading academics from across South Australia's tertiary institutions including the University of South Australia and the University of Adelaide. It was formed based on Commissioner Nyland's recommendations to engage relevant independent experts *external to government* to build a rigorous evidence base to support sustainable change.

Dr Arney supported the EEC in conducting the case study reviews. These reviews provided critical insights into the experience of children and families engaged with child protection. Collectively the work of the EEC identified serious challenges with the structures of the child protection system at that time and provided frank advice on the critical need for reform.

In relation to the specific concerns raised:

- Commissioner Nyland was clear that the government needed to build the evidence base and work with external experts – chiefly the academic sector -

if it was to deliver meaningful child protection reform. The multiple inquiries and reviews over time had provided piecemeal and short-term solutions that had not resulted in substantive change on the ground for children, their families and carers.

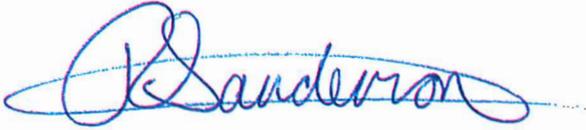
- Since Nyland, the Government has developed research partnerships to continue to build the evidence base for reform. The EEC work has indeed been followed by investment across all three South Australian tertiary institutions to undertake research and evaluation. This includes providing in kind support, letters of support for research funding and the provision of funding. It also includes the sharing of expertise and data so that we can build a rich evidence base capable of translating into practice on the ground.
- The Department for Child Protection has invested in the University of Adelaide, ANROWS and the Flinders University of South Australia to undertake independent research and evaluation that will help inform its practice and policies. It also frequently external experts as critical friends in other areas, including its Expert Aboriginal Child Protection Advisory Committee and SNAICC.
- DCP invested approximately \$1.25m in an ACCP PhD scholarship program to support both new world-leading research and emerging child protection scholars. The investment is entirely consistent with Nyland's vision of developing a foundation of research and evidence to serve as the basis for government decision making. DCP has also permitted tertiary institutions to have access to de-identified data to support research. In accordance with academic protocols, the department is then recognised as an *author* in any resulting literary publication.
- The Terms of Reference for the inquiry are taken directly from the amendment within the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act* and will investigate issues in foster and kinship care at a systems level in accordance with the amendment.

I understand that Dr Arney is working to get the inquiry established and underway as quickly as possible and will be able to provide further information shortly on the submission process. I have every confidence that in establishing this, Dr Arney will treat all carers submissions with the required sensitivity, privacy and confidentiality that is required.

In the meantime, further information is available on the following weblink: <https://www.sa.gov.au/topics/care-and-support/foster-care/inquiry-into-foster-care>. Alternatively, further questions can be directed to the inquiry by email: [carer.inquiry@sa.gov.au](mailto:carer.inquiry@sa.gov.au)

Thank you again for your work in raising these matters on behalf of carers and I hope this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R Sanderson', with a large, sweeping flourish underneath.

Hon. Rachel Sanderson MP  
**Minister for Child Protection**

27 January 2022