RAPAD
REMOTE AREA PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT BOARD

10 January 2026

Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
eec.sen@aph.gov.au
cc: senator.mulholland@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

RE: RAPAD Submission – Quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care systems inquiry

The Central Western Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD) welcomes the opportunity to contribute a late submission to the Senate Committee's inquiry into the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector.

RAPAD is a regional advocacy and development organisation, representing the seven local governments of Central Western Queensland (CWQ). We work collaboratively with government, industry and communities to progress regional priorities and support sustainable economic, environmental and community development. ECEC plays a critical and growing role in supporting families, strengthening communities, and driving long-term sustainability across CWQ, delivering social, economic and workforce benefits across the region.

In early 2025, RAPAD undertook a review of the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector across the region. The review identified a diverse range of challenges faced by communities and reaffirmed that access to ECEC is a critical enabler of regional growth. It confirmed the strong interdependency between ECEC service availability and workforce participation, especially for women, which directly affects the region's ability to attract, retain, and grow its population and economy, and ultimately its capacity to thrive.

There are a range of ECEC services operating across the region run by not-for-profits, local government, community groups and individuals. Service provision, across a range of services and programs does not meet need in most communities in CWQ. The rate of ECEC enrolment per 100 children from birth to nine years in the RAPAD region is half (26 percent) of the Queensland rate (52 percent).[1]

[1] Queensland Government, Department of Education, *The Queensland Early Education and Care Services Census 2023,* custom selection.

We would reiterate many of the major issues raised by others during this inquiry, especially concerning funding models and place based, locally responsive solutions for rural and remote regions. These strategies acknowledge the unique challenges faced by these communities and recognise that ECEC services are important wherever you live. Universal requirements and rigid guidelines do not recognise or support the context-specific challenges of remote communities. We need to do better and be more creative and flexible without compromising safety or quality.

FUNDING CHALLENGES

- **Council-run ECEC services:** Two councils in our region are among those filling an urgent and persistent need by operating ECEC services where an alternative supplier is not available. These are important services in these communities to enable educational opportunities for children, provide employment and enable workforce participation. Both services run at financial losses and are subsidised through council budgets, impacting the delivery of other council services. Expenditure on labour contributes significantly to the cost of running these services. Noting that most of the communities within the region fall into the most disadvantaged populations relative to Queensland[2] and that costs of living are high, RAPAD supports the motion raised by Winton Shire Council (Motion 26) at the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) Annual Conference in 2025 for the State and Federal Governments to provide adequate, flexible, supply-side funding for sustainable ECEC services.
- **Community Child Care Fund (CCCF)**: ECEC services across the CWQ region benefit from CCCF support, which assists in maintaining service sustainability and viability and helps ensure these critical services remain operational. As a competitive grant process, Round 4 of CCCF was overprescribed and some services in the region did not receive funding, adding extra pressure to services. Consideration of an increase in the value of the funding pool so more services can access funding as well as funding options for local governments to remain sustainable while providing ECEC services out of necessity is requested.
- **Building Early Education Fund (BEEF):** RAPAD welcomes the BEEF program, however, requests transparency in the decision-making process for priority areas and expresses concern that existing data sources do not adequately demonstrate current and future needs, and supply and level of disadvantage. The region is experiencing a 'baby boom', both anecdotally and statistically (Crude Birth Rate of 14.3% for CWQ compared to 10.5% for Queensland).[3] RAPAD calls on the Federal Government to consult with community and local governments to ensure regions with small populations and less obvious need are considered for funding.
- **Infrastructure funding:** Ongoing infrastructure expenditure is required to maintain high quality and safe services. Regardless of the size of the service there is a level of maintenance and development of infrastructure required. In rural and remote communities' access to resources and labour expertise can be challenging with cost penalties for distance and transport. These expenses are harder to service is smaller centres.

---

[2] Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Census of Population and Housing: Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA),*Australia 2021 (Queensland Treasury derived).

[3] Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Births, Australia*, various editions; registered births by LGA (RAPAD region) and Queensland, 2024, accessed via the Queensland Statistician's Office, January 2026.

- **High-needs children:** In the RAPAD region, there is a reported increase in the number of children with additional needs, that are challenging to support within early childhood settings. These children often require additional care, time, and specialised support. For children awaiting formal diagnosis—often a lengthy process due to limited availability of service providers available in the region—there is frequently no clear support plan in place, nor adequate access to appropriate resources or trained and experienced staff. This issue has broader community impacts, as families may be forced to leave the region to access suitable services.
- **Child Care Subsidy (CCS):** While the Child Care Subsidy percentage is applied consistently across service types, the hourly rate cap differs between Family Day Care and Long Day Care. The lower hourly cap for Family Day Care can result in higher out-of-pocket costs for families, even when they receive the same subsidy rate. Place-based adjustments to CCS rate caps for rural and remote services would help to address structural inequities, support service viability, and ensure families have equitable access to early childhood education and care regardless of location.

FAMILY DAY CARE AND IN-HOME CARE

- Family Day Care (FDC), In-Venue Care (IVC) and In-Home Care (IHC) provide important service options, for rural and remote communities, including those within the RAPAD region, where centre-based ECEC services are not viable due to small populations, ECEC workforce shortages and high infrastructure costs. In some communities these are the only options, plus offer the potential for flexible hours of care for shift workers and small business owners, many of whom do not have family supports in the region, also underpin the need to expand availability of these services within the region
- While Family Day Care is a viable option for communities and there are qualified educators within the region who have expressed interest in providing care, only one registered Family Day Care educator is currently operating across the region. Barriers include the high costs associated with required residence upgrades—such as building materials, limited availability of tradespeople and the condition of older housing —as well as insurance, resource costs and ongoing reporting and compliance requirements. The limited uptake of Family Day Care in the region is not due to lack of interest, or availability and suitability of educators, rather to structural cost, compliance and training barriers and professional isolation.
- Targeted FDC service establishment funding for educators to help meet the costs of home modifications and resourcing would help incentivise FCD service start-up.
- While supporting quality standards, minimum educator qualifications for FDC educators under the National Quality Framework are a barrier to service establishment in RAPAD communities. Flexible and financially supported training, including paid study while ‘working towards’, rather than ‘holding’ Certificate 3 qualifications would assist bridging the gap.
- Other challenges in our region include limited access and options for training placements, that involve travel and accommodation costs and complex logistics, as well as limited opportunities for local mentoring. A review into potentially reducing the number of placement hours is recommended. Past examples in the region have shown the benefits of local mentors, who also act as connectors between educators, developing a local professional network. These local

supports are the keys to helping educators complete training requirements. In the absence of local mentors, regular visits by training and service providers are essential, and may warrant additional government funding.

- Lack of business training and ongoing support are also challenges. RAPAD is exploring options to support communities with this kind of expertise. Again, additional funding to access this level of support is required.
- ECEC educators offering stand-alone care also operate in the region. Many provide high-quality services and choose to operate outside the approved ECEC system due to prohibitive regulatory and administrative requirements associated with Family Day Care. Where no other approved options are available, these services help to meet local demand.
- Again, RAPAD calls for targeted place-based policy rather than a uniform national response, considering strategies such as targeted funding and support to establish and maintain services, and adjustments to CCS as previously mentioned, reflecting true costs of delivering FDC services in our region as well as access to flexible and supported training pathways, including recognition for prior learning and experience.
- Similarly, there are several older community members with many years of caring for their own and other's children who are excluded from the ECEC system due to regulatory requirements. How can we better support older people, who may not have the computer literacy and other necessary skills to meet regulatory requirements but who would make excellent educators?
- Where the inclusion of Family Day Care educators' own children in service ratios limits service viability or restricts children's access to ECEC, RAPAD calls for the introduction of limited, risk-based flexibility. This would apply in circumstances where no alternative care options are available and child safety requirements can be met, allowing educators' own children to participate in care in addition to the approved ratio.
- Smaller communities in the RAPAD region are exploring In-Venue Care (IVC) as a viable option utilising community infrastructure to deliver ECEC services. Modifications and associated costs to meet NQF requirements are challenges and often prohibitive in our most remote centres, however, IVC is a valuable option. We would seek further concessions and are working on a pilot program outline for flexibility in allowing two (or more) FDC educators to operate from the same venue, at the same time, to increase the number of children who can access the service. These services should also be eligible for infrastructure and service sustainability support funding.
- In-Home Care, like FDC provides an option for ECEC for rural and remote families that would otherwise be unavailable. Finding suitable educators is often a challenge in the RAPAD region. As an under prescribed program more could be done to promote and simplify this program to increase utilisation.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- **Exploring new options for ECEC qualifications:** Consideration could be given to exploring alternative, staged training and qualification pathways for early childhood education and care educators, including the use of a general Certificate II–level ECEC qualification, as in Victoria. An entry-level qualification focused on essential knowledge and skills could enable educators to enter the workforce sooner and begin providing care under appropriate supervision, while progressively

working towards a full Certificate III qualification. This approach may help address barriers to workforce entry, improve qualification completion rates, and support service viability in rural and remote communities, without compromising child safety or quality standards.

- **Professional development and networks:** Staffing limitations or limited opportunities for relief for educators working in isolation often prevent educators from attending professional development without disrupting service delivery. Continuation and extension of programs like professional development subsidies help reduce this barrier, incentivise employment in the industry, improve participation in professional development, support qualification completion, and contribute to improved workforce retention and service quality.

Flexible, place-based early childhood education and care solutions are critical to supporting children's development and wellbeing, enabling workforce participation, and strengthening the long-term sustainability of thriving rural and remote communities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to the Senate Education and Employment References Committees inquiry into the quality and safety of Australia's ECEC sector.

RAPAD would welcome the opportunity to assist the committee in any way and looks forward to the positive impact this inquiry will have in supporting high quality ECEC services for all children, regardless of their location.

Yours sincerely,

Morgan Gronold
Chief Executive Officer RAPAD