**Opening Notes – Aboriginal Mental Health Forum**

Acknowledged the traditional custodians of the land upon which this meeting is held and pay respects to elders past and present.

I would like to thank Barry Hoskins for the “Welcome to Country” and Dinnawan for his performance.

I welcome the Hon Kevin Humphries MP:

* Minister for Mental Health
* Minister for Healthy Lifestyles; and
* Minister for Western NSW

I also welcome Dr Robyn Shields and Aunty Lorraine Peeters.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome delegates to the MNCLHD and to Coffs Harbour.

This forum has been an annual event since 2002 and the aim is to strengthen the Aboriginal Mental Health Workforce.

This year the forum is being combined with the annual gathering of the Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Bringing Them Home workers, hosted by the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council.

The program covers contemporary issues and challenges are particular pertinent to the MNCLHD. You also have some wonderful speakers….congratulations.

We feel privileged to be chosen to host this really important forum.

I am particularly excited about this year’s theme “Valuing the Aboriginal Workforce” and I would hope that this is an acknowledgement of our work in recruitment of our aboriginal people to our workforce and providing opportunities for our aboriginal workforce to develop and achieve in the workplaces.

We are absolutely committed to our aboriginal workforce and I think we have a proud record in this regard.

The MNCLHD is currently developing an Aboriginal Health Strategic Plan from 2014-2018. An important component of the plan is Strategic Direction 4 - Strengthening Aboriginal Workforce.

As Board Chairman I am pleased to say that as a LHD we are determined to exceed the NSW Public Sector target of 2.6% Aboriginal employment. We are working towards a target of 5%.

One of the advantages of being Chair of a LHD is the opportunity to meet senior professionals and Ministers.

It also provides me with an opportunity to express our appreciation to Kevin Humphries for his great work in a very demanding portfolio. His work is critical to the future wellbeing of our communities.

Thank you Minister for your attendance today and I have much pleasure in inviting you to address this important gathering.