

Meeting Communiqué – May 2023

More than 35 members of the Torres Cape Indigenous Council Alliance came together in Cairns on 9 and 10 May for the Alliance's second meeting for 2023. The meeting was held alongside the Regional Sitting of the Queensland Parliament, with members capturing the opportunity to meet with Ministers at the Parliamentary Precinct to raise matters of local and regional importance.

Shadow Ministers Ann Leahy and Fiona Simpson attended the TCICA meeting on 10 May to discuss ongoing issues such as conflict of interest reforms, government regulation, betterment funding, and Blue Cards.

Leaders also heard from several speakers on important matters including health and aged care, conflict of interest matters, and the upcoming referendum. They also heard from members of the Uluru Dialogue on the principles guiding the design of a First Nations Voice to the Federal Parliament.

TCICA 2023 -2026 Strategic Plan

The draft Strategic Plan was presented to members for discussion, noting that it is a high-level document which will be underpinned by several more detailed operational plans including a stakeholder management plan, an advocacy plan, and a communications plan. The strategic plan is crafted around four key themes: Improving Lives; Growing Regional Economies; Strong TCICA Members; and Sustainable Environments and Communities. Work will continue to finalise the plan in the coming months.

TCICA Financial Sustainability (Capability) Project

Jan Xanthopoulos and Diana Lollato of Queensland Treasury Corporation discussed with TCICA six options to improve the financial sustainability of councils: standardised processes; shared services; outsourcing; joint procurement; placements; and workforce planning. The options were identified after 18 months of workshops and surveys with members to fully understand the issues being faced by councils and how they could be addressed with relative ease.

Councils prioritised the six options to narrow down to two options to take forward in the short term. The two options identified were standardised processes and joint procurement.

Health and Aged Care

Health and TORCH (Torres and Cape) health commissioning reform project

The Chair raised the upcoming TORCH briefing meeting and encouraged their attendance.

Members discussed ongoing concerns about health services in the region, including duplication of services and funding and poorly targeted service provision. The lack of data sharing between services remains a significant problem.

Palliative Care

Leaders received a presentation from members of the award-winning TCHHS Pop-Up Palliative Care Service, which focusses on providing holistic, patient driven and patient centred care while supporting families to provide care to their loved ones at home or in the community. Since the program's establishment in October 2022, the team has supported a total of 52 patients and families in Kowanyama, Pormpuraaw, Aurukun, Coen, Lockhart River, Mapoon, Cooktown, Weipa, Napranum, Thursday Island, Badu Island, and Bamaga.

Aged Care Governance

TCICA heard from Barbara Schmidt on the implications for councils following the Commonwealth's aged care reforms. Regulatory reforms in 2023 include a Code of Conduct for aged care staff, strengthened governance and a Serious Incident Response Scheme. Further reforms during 2023 and 2024 include an Independent Hospital and Aged Care Pricing Authority to determine pricing, a Support at Home Program, and a new *Aged Care Act*. The changes to the system mean there are also more opportunities for the development of small businesses to service the needs of communities.

Australian Local Government Association National General Assembly

Members discussed the upcoming Australian Local Government Association National General Assembly in Canberra from 13-16 June. Around 30 Queensland councils are currently registered to attend as part of a delegation led by the Local Government Association of Queensland. Members were encouraged to consider being part of the LGAQ delegation, which has a coordinated program of activity and engagement.

LNP Opposition

Shadow Ministers Ann Leahy (Local Government) and Fiona Simpson (Finance, Better Regulation, Integrity in Government) spoke with leaders on several matters, including conflict of interest reforms, the local government elections in March next year, the need for more betterment funding, burdensome government regulation, duplication in grant funding processes, and the Voice referendum.

Reform and regulation

The Opposition wants to hear from councils about the specific issues being faced following conflict of interest reforms and matters to do with the Office of the Independent Assessor to help shape future Opposition policy. They also want to know about regulation roadblocks and what changes are required to better support councils to deliver services.

KAP's Blue Card Bill is not supported by the Opposition, however they do understand the issues being raised by councils. Members urged the Opposition to reconsider the Bill because the program in its current form is a major barrier to the economic and social participation of people in remote and discrete Indigenous communities.

Funding matters

The Opposition understands the challenges faced by small councils to contribute ten percent of the costs for projects funded under betterment funding and has committed to looking at how they can help reduce this burden for councils. They also understand the position many councils are in because of diminishing Financial Assistance Grants and noted that the Works for Queensland program can help manage the FAGs shortfalls.

Members raised issues around duplication of grant portals and processes and the need to streamline the administrative burden of submitting and reporting on grant funding. It was noted that New South Wales has a good model that could be replicated to drive efficiencies through better systems and processes. Councils were encouraged to write to the Auditor General about the cost of program administration and seek support for an inquiry into the cost of administration and duplication for grantees.

The Voice

LNP State Leader David Crisafulli has not yet determined a position on the Voice and constitutional recognition and at this point it remains a personal vote for LNP members.

Conflict of Interest Toolbox

Dr Chris McLaughlin presented on the Indigenous Local Government Integrity Framework which is being developed by Marrawah Law and funded by the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning.

The team is developing a package of resources designed specifically for the elected members of Indigenous councils to aid their understanding and management of conflicts of interest. The team are also developing a high-level integrity tool which maps the responsibilities of the roles elected members play in their communities (for example: elected member; DOGIT trustee; incorporated land trust trustee) to provide guidance to assist good decision making that guides management of conflicts of interest issues that arise due to the multiple roles Indigenous councillors typically hold.

The Voice and Referendum

Eddie Synot, Geoff Scott, and Dave Lee of the Uluru Dialogue updated TCICA on the campaign for constitutional recognition and a Voice to Parliament. Polling indicates that Queensland is lagging behind in terms of support for a Voice in the Constitution, so it is more important than ever to talk to people on the ground to get their support and also for those who are not currently enrolled to vote to enrol as soon as possible. Dialogue members have plans to visit communities in the coming months to help get the message out and address any concerns people have about the Voice to Parliament.

Should the referendum be successful, there will be a process with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the Parliament, and the broader public to settle the Voice design. Eight [design principles](#) have been developed by the First Nations Referendum Working Group to guide the Parliament in the design of the Voice to Parliament.

Referendum Process

Jeff Pope, Deputy Electoral Commissioner of the Australian Electoral Commission addressed TCICA on the 2023 referendum. A draft of the question to be put to voters is in the [*Constitutional Alteration \(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice\) 2023 Bill*](#). It is expected that the referendum will be held sometime between September and December this year, with the Government to decide on the exact timing.

Tourism

Mark Olsen of Tourism Tropical North Queensland briefed members on the recently developed First Nations Tourism Action Plan. The [*First Nations Tourism Action Plan*](#), officially launched on 11 May during the Regional Sitting of Parliament, outlines a range of measures designed to embrace the full potential of Indigenous tourism in the region and to double both the number of Indigenous experiences and the number of Indigenous people employed in the Tropical North Queensland tourism industry in the region by 2032.

Members were also briefed on the process currently underway to develop the 10-year [*Destination Management Plan*](#), which guides the sustainable growth of tourism towards 2032 and beyond. All members are encouraged to participate in the development of the plan by attending one of the regional sessions or completing a [*survey*](#).

Mr Olsen flagged an opportunity for members who are progressing tourism ventures or supporting the development of tourism to visit New Zealand to meet with Māori tourism operators and those involved in the tourism industry, including local councils, to learn from them about how they have developed successful and sustainable tourism businesses.

Tourism levy / environmental tax

TCICA spoke about the need to generate revenue by way of a Cape York levy or environmental tax to help manage the impact of tourism on the region. Cook Shire Council agreed to lead a working group to explore options for how a levy could work. TTNQ recognises the issues and will throw their support behind this.