



TCICA Meeting Communiqué – July 2022

The Torres Cape Indigenous Council Alliance held its third meeting for 2022 on 12 and 13 July in Cairns, representing one of the largest regional gatherings of Mayors, Councillors and Chief Executives of Indigenous local governments in the country, and nearly 20% of all local governments in Queensland with the welcome addition of Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire Council.

TCICA was joined by several guests throughout the two-day meeting, including Ann Leahy MP, Shadow Minister for Local Government, Disaster Recovery and Volunteers, Fiona Simpson MP, Shadow Minister for Finance and Better Regulation and Shadow Minister for Integrity in Government, Toowoomba Regional Council Mayor Paul Antonio, and Chief Executive of the Local Government Association of Northern Territory Sean Holden, who was accompanied by Senior Policy Advisor Mary Watson. Key project partners and senior government officials also participated in the meeting, along with representatives of the Local Government Association of Queensland.

Indigenous education options

Toowoomba Mayor Cr Paul Antonio addressed TCICA on education and training opportunities for students from the Cape York, Torres Strait and Gulf region. Home to eight boarding schools and more than 50 primary and secondary schools, Cr Antonio made a case for the Toowoomba region to host students, with scholarships available for Indigenous students under the [Yalari](#) initiative. Toowoomba also offers many post-school education and employment opportunities, including the Qantas Group Pilot Academy at Toowoomba Wellcamp Airport and employment on any one of the numerous massive infrastructure projects underway in the region.

Mayor Antonio also discussed with TCICA opportunities for council staff exchanges. This was acknowledged as a great initiative to build knowledge, skills, experiences and partnerships between councils and as a way to help address short term executive staff shortfalls, particularly in remote local governments.

Ann Leahy MP and Fiona Simpson MP

TCICA had a broad ranging discussion with Ms Leahy and Ms Simpson on issues including the Belcarra local government reforms, financial sustainability, the impact of amalgamations on local governments and their communities, the need for Weipa to be 'normalised' under the *Local Government Act*, and housing. Ms Simpson strongly encouraged Members to keep her informed of advocacy on housing matters as the State Opposition can help address barriers and support advocacy efforts.

Mayors highlighted the challenges of dealing with conflict of interest provisions following the Belcarra reforms and that the one size fits all approach does not work. Mayors also spoke about the significant increase in vexatious and unjustified complaints against

councillors and the Office of the Independent Assessor complaints handling process. Ms Leahy advised TCICA of the parliamentary inquiry into the functions of the Independent Assessor underway, which is due to report soon. Ms Leahy also spoke to Members about the Opposition's interest in looking at depreciation schedules for local government to understand whether there are opportunities to improve outcomes and developing a policy framework for local government amalgamations to help address failures.

National Indigenous Australians Agency

Marnie Wettenhall of the NIAA updated TCICA on the progress of key Commonwealth initiatives following the change of government.

Several communities are working with the department and Pama Futures under the Empowered Communities initiative to establish local decision-making partnerships, in alignment with Local Thriving Communities. Members noted that Mapoon Aboriginal Shire Council has a good model which can be replicated in other communities.

Incoming Indigenous Australians Minister Linda Burney MP has flagged her intention to abolish the Community Development Program, although current contracts will remain in place until they expire. A new program to be developed is intended to give communities control over how services are delivered, and who delivers them. Members resolved to write to Minister Burney and her department to ensure TCICA has a seat at the table during the CDP redesign process.

Members noted that Senator Pat Dodson in his role as Special Envoy for Reconciliation and the Implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart will soon be in the region to talk to stakeholders about the Voice to Parliament process.

Health system reform project (TORCH)

Matthew Cooke of QAIHC and Marguerite Taylor of Queensland Health updated TCICA on the progress of the Torres and Cape Healthcare Commissioning entity project. The next step is for communities to come together to talk about how they see a commissioning entity working for them to drive better outcomes. Councils will play a key role in advising how consultations with communities should take place, with resources to help with consultations developed by Queensland Health. It was noted that Health Action Teams could play a key role in leading grassroots community conversations.

Mayors noted the role Councils play in addressing public health issues through the provision of services such as water supply, waste management, housing, and environmental health, but that much greater financial support is needed to ensure councils are properly funded to meet their obligations.

Local Government Association of Northern Territory

LGANT Chief Executive Sean Holden spoke to TCICA about LGANT, their work supporting member councils in the Northern Territory, and LGANT's five key strategic priorities to support members through addressing the issues of finance, governance and workforce, profile and reputation, economic development, climate, waste and environment, and Aboriginal outcomes.

Mr Holden introduced TCICA to the CouncilBiz initiative, the background behind its establishment, and how it works to provide a range of shared services across its nine councils members. Services include a common information technology platform (server infrastructure, IT support, application hosting etc), business software support, financial services processing, and procurement. Mayors spoke about the merits of a shared platform and opportunities to also consider the OneGov single transaction platform which is used by the City of Darwin to reduce silos within their operations.

Mr Holden briefed TCICA on the Northern Australia Local Government Summit initiative, which would be intended to be facilitated as a partnership between LGANT, LGAQ and the Western Australia Local Government Association. If supported, TCICA will be invited to provide input into an outcomes-focussed summit agenda, and timing of the summit (for example, to coincide with the Developing Northern Australia Conference to be held in Darwin next year).

TCICA members resolved to support the summit and provide input. With many shared challenges and opportunities across our two organisations, there is strong value in working together to share knowledge, build relationships and learn from each other.

Cape Resilience Project

Alex Ung of UNGANCO updated Members on the rollout of the asset management system project being delivered across eight councils. Visits to Napranum, Weipa, Mapoon, and Aurukun are planned for next week as part of the 'discovery' phase of the project and for the project team to meet with key council representatives and start the process of mapping council assets.

It is expected that opportunities will be available to Councils not involved in this round of funding to participate in a second round, pending the continuation of the Commonwealth's Preparing Australian Communities grant program.

Local Government Association of Queensland

LGAQ's Simon Booth and Allen Cunneen briefed members on the progress of LGAQ's work and Indigenous Leaders Forum outcomes, with reference to LGAQ's briefing document provided to members. Members discussed digital connectivity as a key ongoing issue and the potential to access the submarine cable running through the Torres Strait. Members also discussed housing and home ownership and the need to ensure new homeowners are aware of their obligations as a homeowner such as insurance, home maintenance, and rating charges. Concerns were raised about valuing housing in communities when there is no existing housing market and what role the Valuer General could play.

Members noted the closing date of 10 August for policy motions to be put forward to the LGAQ Annual Conference.

State School Indigenous Education

Mayors Keri Tamwoy and Bradley Creek updated TCICA on their work on the project board co-designing local community education bodies. The pilot project aims to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by empowering local

Aboriginal communities and Torres Strait Islander communities to inform school decision-making. To date, 11 of the 13 pilot schools have established a Local Community Education Body (LCEB) with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members to co-design strategies to assist Aboriginal students and/or Torres Strait Islander students to succeed at school. Each LCEB is co-chaired by the principal and a local Indigenous person. Schools in the TCICA region involved in the pilot are Aurukun and Western Cape College. An evaluation of the pilot will be undertaken next year to inform the department's thinking on whether the model will be expanded beyond the 13 pilot schools.

Members spoke of the need to ensure the education curriculum includes a strong cultural curriculum and truth-telling to empower students to learn and understand their cultural history. Aurukun school is a great example of a school which embraces cultural learning, with Wik-Mungkan language, cultural and traditions taught by community Elders.

Members noted that one of the biggest issues for remote schools is the lack of continuity of school principals and other school leaders.

Regional Resilience Strategy

Julie Brook from the Queensland Reconstruction Authority briefed TCICA on the final Regional Resilience Strategy and accompanying regional action plan, local action plans, and regional resilience baseline checklist. Ownership of the regional action plan, local action plans, and regional resilience baseline checklist rests with TCICA and individual communities. There is no process of evaluation or oversight by QRA, rather these documents are intended to be used to help councils and TCICA understand local and regional priorities for implementation and to access funding. The resilience baseline checklist is a tool for communities to understand their current situation and to help plan and guide funding applications.

Members agreed to endorse in principle the Regional Resilience Strategy.

Telstra activity

Ms Rachel Cliffe from Telstra briefed Members on current and future Telstra activity in the region. There will be projects underway to upgrade the fibre optic cable up the Cape via the western side and through Normanton to Burketown under their 'Ring of Resilience' initiative. New base stations will be delivered in Seisa and Cooktown, as well as projects on Mornington Island and in Lockhart River, where telecommunications will be upgraded to a 4G network following the next wet season.

Future rounds of funding under the Connecting Northern Australia initiative and Regional Connectivity Program will provide more opportunities to address connectivity issues in the TCICA region.

Financial Sustainability Project – Initiative 6 “Capability”

Anthony Ottaway and Jan Xanthopoulos spoke to Members about the next stage of TCICA's financial sustainability project, which is to address issues of local government capability.

A comprehensive survey has been designed to identify key capability and capacity gaps in councils' asset management, financial management, risk process and governance, identify causation factors, and help inform a range of options to address them. Responses will be collected and analysed by QTC and reported back to TCICA in aggregate. Following the survey, QTC will hold one-on-one sessions with councils to discuss the survey and gain further insights.

Once capability issues have been understood and workshopped with individual councils over the next few months to November, QTC will work with TCICA to identify potential options to address them. The options analysis work is expected to take place from November to December this year. Following the options analysis and assessment, detailed implementation requirements will be developed, with this work taking place during 2023. The four non-member Indigenous local governments of Cherbourg, Woorabinda, Palm Island, and Yarrabah will also be invited to participate.

Other Business

Canberra Advocacy Visit

TCICA members agreed to support a TCICA delegation to Canberra in late November / early December to meet with incoming Government ministers and advocate on matters of key importance. The visit will be planned over the coming months.

First Nations Consultative Committee

Members discussed the make-up of the newly formed eight-member First Nations Consultative Committee to inform the Queensland Government on their input to the national Indigenous Voice process and design of a Queensland Indigenous Voice model.

TCICA members resolved to write to LGAQ asking LGAG to invite the committee to address the next Indigenous Leaders Forum to be held in October in Cairns.

Tourism Impact Management

Members discussed the ever-increasing numbers of tourists travelling to the Cape region and the lack of coordination to address tourism impact management issues such as trespass on land, environmental damage, breach of cultural protocols, and overburdening limited community resources such as water and food supply. There is no one authority taking responsibility for managing these issues, leaving it to communities to deal with the consequences.

TCICA will look to establish a working group to determine a way forward and put in place strategies to ensure tourism delivers only positive economic, social, and environmental benefits. Management plans, restricted access to cultural sites, and increased visitor fees to help support new tourism infrastructure may be considered as ways to address the issues.

2032 Olympic Games

With the 2032 Olympic Games expected to increase tourism to the region and provide opportunities to showcase Indigenous peoples and culture, focussed effort is needed to

ensure the Cape York, Torres Strait and Gulf region is ready to capitalise on the increased attention. TCICA will engage with key decision-makers to consider how best to ensure our region does not miss out and what councils need to do to put forward a strong case for regional involvement.

Census data

Mayor Patricia Yusia raised the issue of the recent release of census population data and ongoing undercounts as a result of poor data collection processes in communities. Members noted the implications for funding as a result, with population counts being a critical metric used in determining funding under programs such as Financial Assistance Grants and for other population-based methodologies. It was noted that community master plans estimated resident population more accurately and that council doorknocking of individual houses has also more accurately reflected true numbers. Advocacy on this matter will continue.

Staff Housing

Members discussed the need for support for council staff housing in communities, and the need for government agencies to provide more housing for their staff to free up housing for local people. The financial position of councils limits their options to finance new housing themselves yet there remains a critical need to provide more housing to attract and appropriately house staff. Advocacy on this matter will continue.

Future Meetings

TCICA's next meeting is scheduled for 14 & 15 of September in the Weipa, Napranum and Mapoon region.

TCICA's November meeting will be rescheduled to 15 November to coincide with a planned climate forum to be held by the Department of Seniors, Disability Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships.