



# TORRES SHIRE COUNCIL SUBMISSION

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION ISSUES PAPER  
- INDIGENOUS EVALUATION STRATEGY,  
JUNE 2019

Dalassa Yorkston, Chief Executive Officer, Torres Shire Council,  
68 Douglas Street, THURSDAY ISLAND QLD 4875  
[ceo@torres.qld.gov.au](mailto:ceo@torres.qld.gov.au)

## Executive Summary

Torres Shire Council (hereafter referred to as “Council”) supports the Australian Government Productivity Commissioner’s (hereinafter referred to as Commissioner) observation at page 3 of the Issues Paper, that delivering better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is premised on self-determination. Regional autonomy has been the aspiration of Torres Strait Islander peoples since the Inaugural Island Council Meeting in 1937. This aspiration has been outlined in numerous reports and enquiries involving both State and Federal governments for decades, including the Report to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs –*Torres Strait Islanders - A new deal - A Report on Greater Autonomy for Torres Strait Islanders* (August 1997) and from the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) initiated Greater Autonomy Task Force, which created the Bamaga Accord (October 2001). The State of Queensland and Commonwealth Governments endorsed in principle the establishment of a Regional Assembly in 1997, executed under the Commonwealth and consistent with both the 1985 Torres Strait Treaty and the United Nations Declaration of indigenous Rights to which Australia is a signatory.

For too long, policy makers and governments have over-complicated the root cause of policy and program failures affecting First Nations people. They have argued, as indeed may be discerned in the Productivity Commission’s Issues Paper, that a locus of such failure resides in policy and program evaluation. Council submits that the root cause is the absence of indigenous agency, indigenous policy design and indigenous program control. Council asserts that the primacy of focus now should be on the co-design of the programs emanating out of the work of the Joint Council between representatives of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and a Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Bodies (Coalition of Peaks).

Council supports a reinvigoration and reformed purpose to CDP in the terms outlined in Council’s submission; and is keen to be an active participant in this approach and in delivering the Program (CDP).

Council thanks the Productivity Commission in providing the opportunity to have input into the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy and commends its Submission to the Commission.

## **Introduction**

Torres Shire Council supports the Productivity Commission's observation at page 3 of the Issues Paper, June 2019, that delivering better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is premised on self-determination. Council in its 2019 10-Point Election Plan noted the following:

“Regional autonomy has been the aspiration of Torres Strait Islander peoples since the Inaugural Island Council Meeting in 1937. This aspiration has been outlined in numerous reports and enquiries involving both State and Federal governments for decades, including the Report to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs –*Torres Strait Islanders - A new deal - A Report on Greater Autonomy for Torres Strait Islanders* (August 1997) and from the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) initiated Greater Autonomy Task Force, which created the Bamaga Accord (October 2001). The State of Queensland and Commonwealth Governments endorsed the establishment of a Regional Assembly in 1997, executed under the Commonwealth and consistent with both the 1985 Torres Strait Treaty and the United Nations Declaration of indigenous Rights to which Australia is a signatory. Therefore, implementing a Regional Assembly is one endorsed bilaterally and is consistent with, and forms part of, complying with Australia's international legal obligations.

The Joint Leaders Forum on Thursday Island, 6 May 2014, unanimously resolved to progress the development of the Torres Strait governance model. The Leaders Forum was convened to discuss formation of a new ‘One Boat’ governance model for the Cape and Torres Strait Region. The ‘One Boat’ governance model seeks to drive down the cost of governance, whilst improving transparency, accountability and efficiency in service delivery and eliminating inter-agency/governmental duplication, stakeholder misalignment and waste.

With the full support of all levels of Government, the “One Boat” governance model, whilst providing good governance under Western principles, facilitates greater self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Nation peoples and complements and respects traditional practices that form the very fabric of the Region. The Leaders Forum came in the wake of historic grants of Torres Strait

Islander Land in communal Freehold by the State Government under the *Torres Strait Islander Land Act* 1991 (Qld) on Mer (Murray) Island on 14 December 2012 and Badu Island on 1 February 2014, to the Traditional Owners. The Queensland Productivity Commission December 2017 report, *Service delivery in remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities*, noted that a “key aspiration of the region and its leadership is to work towards achieving Regional Governance to enable local/regional control and management of all Government and non-Government services and programmes being delivered in the region. (Torres Strait Regional Authority sub. 22, p. 2). The Report also noted: Closing the Gap on Indigenous disadvantage requires a paradigm shift in the approach of government to service delivery in remote Indigenous communities ... For too long, Indigenous communities have been told what is best for them. This disempowers and alienates communities”. (Local Government Association of Queensland sub. 14, p. 19).

There has been eighty-two (82) years of talking. It is now time for action”<sup>1</sup>.

## **Closing the Gap**

Whilst the Commonwealth has committed to co-design of Closing the Gap from 2019-onwards, the Australian Government Productivity Commission (hereafter referred to as “the Productivity Commission”) notes that of the Closing the Gap targets set to 2018, only two of the seven were on track. The Issues Paper stresses better evaluation of policies; and in so doing somewhat misses the point. Certainly, evaluation and evidence-based decision making are germane to determining the success or otherwise of programs and initiatives; but if these programs do not emanate from and are not designed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, they will continue to fail.

The Issues Paper notes the total spend and per capita spend on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (\$33.4 billion as at 2015-2016 and per capita \$44,886). It fails to note that the targeted allocation of money at poor performing programs and entities and failing to support those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations kicking goals leaves any intelligent bystander with the impression that the Federal Government throws money at troubled organisations and communities to “keep them quiet”, rather than achieving discernible and measurable improvements based on a self-determination model.

---

<sup>1</sup> Dalassa Yorkston, Chief Executive Officer, Torres Shire Council, Priority One, pp 11-14

For too long, policy makers and governments have over-complicated the root cause of policy and program failures affecting First Nations people. They have argued, as indeed may be discerned in the Productivity Commission's Issues Paper, that a locus of such failure resides in policy and program evaluation. Council submits that the root cause is the absence of indigenous agency, indigenous policy design and indigenous program control. Council asserts that the primacy of focus now should be on the co-design of the programs emanating out of the work of the Joint Council, and consequently and subsequently there must be the co-design of effective and objective evaluation of the programs.

Council notes that a meeting of the Joint Council on Closing the Gap was held in Adelaide on Friday 23 August 2019, between representatives of COAG and the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Bodies (Coalition of Peaks).

In its second meeting, the Joint Council agreed to work towards a new National Agreement Closing the Gap.

Importantly, it also agreed in principle to the following three priority reforms to underpin the new agreement and accelerate progress on Closing the Gap:

1. Developing and strengthening structures to ensure the full involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in shared decision making at the national, state and local or regional level and embedding their ownership, responsibility and expertise to close the gap;
2. Building the formal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services sector to deliver closing the gap services and programs in agreed priority areas; and
3. Ensuring all mainstream government agencies and institutions undertake systemic and structural transformation to contribute to Closing the Gap.

The priority reforms will form the basis of engagements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives of communities and organisations across Australia and will focus on building support and what is needed to make them a success.

In another first, the engagements will be led by the Coalition of Peaks, with the support of Australian Governments.<sup>2</sup>

Council wholeheartedly endorses the Joint Council resolutions.

There is considerable scholarship on the centrality of indigenous knowledge and perspectives in design and in implementing evaluation strategies. Romlie Mokak, Productivity Commissioner at a NAIDOC event, Institute of Public Administration Australia Canberra, Tuesday 2 July 2019 in a speech titled “A Whole of Government Indigenous Evaluation Strategy” noted that the Productivity Commission was asked to develop a whole-of-government evaluation strategy to be used by all Australian Government agencies, for policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. He stated:

*“It is clear that the value of evaluation will be limited in the absence of strong and sustainable mechanisms to feed evaluation findings, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, perspectives and priorities, into the policymaking process.”<sup>3</sup>*

Council asserts that the primacy of focus now should be on the co-design of the programs emanating out of the work of the Joint Council and consequently and subsequently there must be the co-design of effective and objective evaluation of the programs.

### **Community Development Program**

Council notes the Productivity Commission’s Issues Paper at page 11 discusses the CDP and states that “CDP was estimated to have increased the share of participants achieving a 26 week job outcome by around one percentage point”. Council believes that CDP can do so much better and so much more. Council’s aspirations for the CDP are as follows:

- Has local control;
- Has outcomes that lead to investment back into the community;

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://nacchocommunique.com/2019/08/26/naccho-aboriginal-health-coag-closingthegap-pat-turner-today-marks-a-significant-step-forward-in-our-historic-partnership-between-governments-and-the-coalition-of-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-i/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.pc.gov.au/news-media/speeches/indigenous-evaluation/indigenous-evaluation-strategy.pdf>

- Addresses current product and service gaps throughout the community (creating opportunity) and the need to focus on start-ups and the creation of commercially viable businesses;
- Ensures spent and unspent funds (if any) remain in the region;
- Ensures hosted placements support social enterprises in the region; and
- Reflects the Forrest Review support for community-owned and operated social enterprises.

Council's ambition for the CDP 2019 onwards is rooted in its belief that it is not about work-for-the-dole, but rather is focused on employment development and business start-ups, increased social and community capacity building and economic development; so that real jobs are created, real businesses are created and so that local economies and communities may flourish. This approach has been the focus of Council's past representations to the Federal Government regarding the CDP.

A review of the 4-quarter smoothed series, Australian Government Department of Jobs and Small Business, Small Area Labour Markets Australia various editions reveal the unemployment rate in Torres (S) LGA in June quarter 2018 was 10.4 per cent that translates to an unemployment rate of 64 persons for each community in the TSC local government area (LGA). Whilst statistically significant compared to the Queensland average of 6%, these numbers also represent a necessary economy of scale to ensure success in developing employment and business opportunity and enhancing and improving the region's economic health and sustainability. Council is an employer that is well established in the region and has the necessary social, educational and business supports to ensure that CDP is successful. Council has partnerships within the region and broader northern area with the community, local business and industry, education and training providers and government agencies.

<b>Government</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Business</b>	<b>Education &amp; Training</b>
<b>Torres Strait Regional Authority</b>	Mura Kosker	All airport leases	Tagai College beacon program
<b>Torres Strait Island Regional Council</b>	Regional Organisation of Councils in Cape York	Major supporter of local business	Torres Strait TAFE
<b>Northern Area Council</b>	Peninsula Regional Council	Kaurareg Elders Corporation	Traditional Aboriginal
<b>Cairns Council</b>	Regional Council	Torres Strait Sports and Recreation Association	Youth and Recreation
<b>Queensland Department of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs</b>	Health Department	Port Kennedy Association	Liquor Accord Partnership with police and business
<b>Department of Housing and Public Works</b>	Department of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs	Strong links with local employment services CEA, ITEC, Jobskills 360	James Cook University
<b>Queensland Service</b>	Police	Horn Island Residents & Ratepayers Association Rotary Thursday Island	Community Enterprises Australia
			Development of Council staff Staff with Cert IV in training and assessment

Council supports a reinvigoration and reformed purpose to CDP in the terms outlined above.

Council is keen to be an active participant in this approach and in delivering the Program.

Council thanks the Productivity Commission in providing the opportunity to have input into the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy and commends our Submission to the Productivity Commission.

Dalassa Yorkston

**Chief Executive Officer**  
Torres Shire Council  
14<sup>th</sup> October 2019