

Monday 15 April

Mayor Gela addresses his newly elected Council



Fifteen Councillors have taken the Oath of Office in the presence of their families, friends and colleagues. Mayor Fred Gela has been re-elected for a third term and Cr Keith Fell is back again as Deputy Mayor.

In his acceptance speech Mayor Gela thanked everyone for the mandate to lead and represent the rights, and interests of our constituents and emphasised Council's commitment to **Governance Reform** as the critical issue to "going forward, and driving change."

"The Torres Strait is over-governed and over-regulated. There is too much skimming, and too many organisations. We have organisations feathering their own nests and protecting their own brand"

"Money is being funneled through layers and layers of bureaucracy, which is simply absorbing much needed program dollars. We are lucky if we get 15c out of the dollar. The delivery of services and jobs needs to be delivered at a grassroots level so we can effectively address our high unemployment levels".

"If we want to continue to elevate **Governance Reform** we need key organisations sharing the same vision. I don't want my kids, or grandchildren, talking about our regions high unemployment levels in years to come."

"Our Council is in an opportune position to jointly broker and advocate the establishment of **Regional Economic Initiatives**, such as a joint venture barge operation. Our constituents should be afforded the opportunity to become shareholders. Other industries such as ownership of hotels and motels should also be looked at".

Financial Sustainability and Asset Rehabilitation

The Mayor called for Councillors "to manage community expectations of the wants and the needs, because there is a distinctive difference between the two when it comes to community assets. Council is not in a position to replace assets as and when they fall

due. It is not sustainable. We need to develop and implement a three-year improvement plan to rehabilitate our assets.”

“Council has an asset base of \$1.1 Billion. In the perfect world we would need an injection of between \$15 – 20 Million annually, so that we’re able to replace and renew assets to an acceptable standard. Federal and State funding needs to align with Local Government Asset Management Plans.”

“We are currently operating with a small budgeted operating surplus which means we are able to manage within our means. We can continue to provide services and we can continue to provide local employment. We cannot however cover this asset depreciation.”

“Sustainability has to be at the forefront of our conversations going forward.”

Climate Change Adaptation:

“Council will continue to have serious conversations around Climate Change Adaptation, and continue to advocate for further investments for the implementation of protection works to identified priority communities. This includes building seawalls, sand replenishment and maintaining foreshores to protect cultural sites of importance.”

“We know what our communities will look like in 30 years with rising sea levels and we haven’t even considered the repercussions of a catastrophic event.”

“For some of our islands we will need to consider relocating people, within their *own* island, – this is why our future planning is critical. Our peoples land is their birthright. This will involve a lot of complex negotiations for our people.”

“I thank God for his many blessings and acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Torres Strait - including the Kaurareg people - whose land we stand on today. I would like to acknowledge our Elders past and present, our spiritual leaders, and all of our constituents across Zenadth Kes.”