
Media Release | Torres Strait wins in Queensland Budget

Statement by Mayor Fred Gela
19 June 2018

The Torres Strait had some big wins in this month's Queensland budget with the Palaszczuk Government committing to most of the issues advocated by the Torres Strait Islands Regional Council.

On behalf of the TSIRC I welcome the Government's demonstration of commitment to our region. However, it needs to be acknowledged that our wins in the state budget were not just benevolent gestures from the Government but followed a lot of hard work and concerted lobbying efforts by TSIRC and others.

In March this year I met with the Treasurer and Deputy Premier, Jackie Trad, and other senior Government Ministers, to advocate for key priorities affecting our island communities.

While we did not get everything we had asked for, and I'll come back to this, I want to take the opportunity to thank the Palaszczuk Government for being true to their word and delivering on their promises.

This is the way it should be; Governments must align their funding with the priorities set by Council to provide appropriate and sustainable infrastructure in our region. Both the Council and State and Federal governments must also ensure that infrastructure funding represents good value for money and the avoidance of "white-elephant-type" developments.

Put simply, Torres Strait Islanders, and their Council, understand our needs and priorities better than any Brisbane or Canberra politician and bureaucrat. The imperative is for all levels of Government to collaborate to ensure the best possible outcomes for our people. That collaboration must be informed and led by Torres Strait Islanders through local Government.

So, what did the Palaszczuk Government's budget deliver?

Torres Strait seawalls

The State will provide an additional \$20 million over three years from 2018-19 pending matching Federal Government funding, which will go some way in delivering protective works against coastal erosion and tidal inundation on Boigu, Poruma, Warraber, Masig & Iama Communities.

The ball is now firmly in the court of the Federal Minister, Senator Nigel Scullion, to jointly fund this critical work. Without bipartisan funding support we risk losing the investment on the table.

Our people cannot continue to be left to the mercies of climate change and king tides and Council will fight hard to secure this next round of funds.

Waste Removal

From 2018-19 the Government is committing \$5 million over two years to conduct the removal of waste metal build-up including vehicle stockpiles. Council is currently seeking more information from the Government on how this will occur.

Water and Sewerage

The budget commits \$51m to Council for the upgrade of water and sewerage infrastructure from the \$120m Indigenous Councils Critical Infrastructure Program (ICCIP).

Good news. However, there is a big flaw in the arrangements for this funding. Originally Council had four years to deliver this work, allowing us time to best utilize our own local workforce. Now we are told we have a little over 2 years. The budget's timeframe will mean a real risk that local employment and economic opportunities will be lost to mainland suppliers and contractors.

I've spoken to the Minister for Local Government and am confident that this matter will be addressed.

Despite these ongoing issues the Queensland budget has delivered to the people of the Torres Straits and I am proud of the part that TSIRC played in making this happen.

As Mayor of the Torres Strait Islands Regional Council I can assure my people that Council and I will continue to work hard and advocate strongly for both Governments to listen to our voices and address key regional priorities.

ENDS

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