
MAYORAL STATEMENT | INDIGENEOUS ADVISORY COUNCIL

The recent appointment made by the Prime Minister's for the Indigenous Advisory Council (IAC) demonstrates that our **great country** still struggles to acknowledge the fact that there are two distinct First Nations people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Torres Strait Islanders have again been completely overlooked with the assumption that our priorities, and *kastoms* (customs) are the same. This is not the case.

The IAC is intended as a strategy to inform government policy, strengthen meaningful connection and readdress the social health determinants that impact our lives today, and into the future. Yet there is no representation for our people.

The Far North Queensland region has one of the highest Indigenous populations - at just under 15% - or just over 40,000 people – and is nationally significant as a location of Torres Strait Islander people.

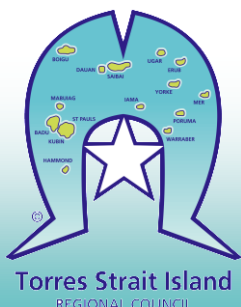
When Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull recently suspended the former Indigenous Advisory Council, Senator Pat Dodson, Labour's Indigenous Affairs spokesperson said that "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander decision-making needs to be returned to communities and their entities. This path will give some credibility to the government's mantra of doing things with us, not to us."

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull also reflected this statement with "The new Council will play an important role by engaging at the heart of Government"" collaborating with other Aboriginal and **Torres Strait Islander leaders**" And I couldn't agree more. This is the Federal government's opportunity to reflect our needs and aspirations, and to prove they are committed to working *with* us to Close the Gap.

The Australian Socio-Economic Indexes for Area (SEIFA) places Torres Strait and the Northern Peninsula Area in the High Percentile Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSD) with third world status *despite* all the State and Commonwealth investments.

In the event that the Indigenous Advisory Council expands membership to include regional representation, we hope that a leader of high esteem is selected by the people, for the people - rather than hand-picked from Canberra. If there's insufficient time to engage with the region, then we ask our politicians to engage with the democratically elected leaders who represent the rights and interests of our people.

Even with 20 years' experience in the political arena, this is not a self-interested attempt to seek selection for membership. It is an attempt for our region to be best represented, and to ensure greater participation and better outcomes for our people.



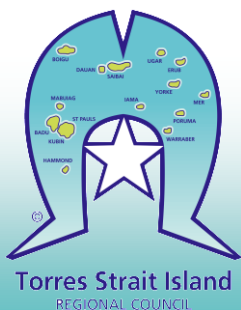
Empowering our people in our decision,
in our culture, for our future.

Our region needs someone who has risen from the grass-roots and has experience operating at the same caliber of their fellow Indigenous Advisory Council members. We require strategic representation from a leader with expertise across academic and community circles.

I don't want a person who is merely political 'window dressing' for the region. I want someone who is switched on. Our voice needs to be heard at the highest levels of government. We need a dynamic leader that can fully participate, has the professional expertise to engage in complex policy discussions, and is unafraid to engage in difficult discussions.

The future of our region depends upon it.

Mayor Gela



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