

# 2023 Torres Strait Islands and Northern Peninsula Area Cost of Living Summit outcome report

## Message from the Co-Chairs

**On 20 March 2023, the Queensland Government convened the Cost of Living Summit: Torres Strait Islands and Northern Peninsula Area on Thursday Island.**

Cost of living pressures are being felt across Queensland, but we know that these pressures are even more deeply felt in remote and regional areas of our state, including in the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area.

Supply chains in these areas can be complex, with significant distances and operational challenges having a dramatic impact on the cost and availability of food, clothing, fuel and other essential items.

A Cost of Living Summit was held on Thursday Island to identify solutions to cost of living concerns raised during a Community Cabinet meeting held on Thursday Island on 5 September 2022. Local Member, Cynthia Lui MP, worked closely with Mayor Yen Loban, Mayor

Phillemon Mosby and Mayor Patricia Yusia to deliver a truly community-led event.

The Cost of Living Summit provided a forum for more than 100 residents, local businesses and community organisations to work together with state and local government representatives to develop practical local solutions.

We heard from community members on five key themes: freight, food security, marine and transport infrastructure, energy, and housing. The outcome from these discussions was clear – there must be community-driven action to meet local needs, build local capability, and provide meaningful local jobs.

At the Summit we announced a range of new initiatives intended to support the Torres Strait Islands, Cape York, Gulf and Northern Peninsula Area community to navigate these challenges.

This is only the start, as we now shift to work with local communities to implement many of these initiatives and programs in a way that best drives outcomes for the people in the Torres Strait, Cape York, Gulf and Northern Peninsula Area.

We have listened to the local community and local leaders and we are committed to taking action, including through genuine tripartite engagement between local, state and federal governments on the challenges raised at the Summit.

We thank everyone who participated in the Summit.

*Co-Chairs – Minister for Transport and Main Roads, Mark Bailey MP, and Member for Cook, Cynthia Lui MP*



*Business, community and government representatives at the Torres Strait Islands and Northern Peninsula Area Cost of Living Summit.*



## Panel session

Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Shannon Fentiman MP, as the Ministerial Champion for the Torres Strait region, facilitated a panel discussion with representatives across various sectors of the community.

Panel members shared valuable insights into the barriers for accessing services such as childcare, housing, and other essential services.

Panel members highlighted the need for collaboration between all levels of government to deliver fit-for-purpose services for the regions.



The panel discussed the need to bring the community along for the transition to renewable energy, including a transition away from diesel generation, undertaken with community consultation, providing local benefits and local employment.

A transition to renewable energy was recognised as a key opportunity to provide employment for young people in the region. The panel communicated the need for increased

local job opportunities for young people in the region, as well as for the school education system to better assist school leavers to transition to tertiary education, other skilling opportunities, and employment.

Overall, the panel highlighted the need for meaningful and lasting outcomes that account for the unique challenges and opportunities faced by the region.

## Marine and transport infrastructure

### Investing in marine and transport infrastructure solutions.

The Queensland Government has committed to invest:

- **\$80 million** in joint federal and state funding for marine infrastructure
- **\$500,000** to help ensure reliable ferry services to Thursday Island.

We know safe, reliable, and fit-for-purpose transport infrastructure can increase economic activity and

tourism. It's about more than just getting from one place to another – it's about empowering locals and local economies.

A total of **\$80 million** has been committed by state and federal governments to support community priorities for marine infrastructure as part of the Torres Strait Islands Marine Infrastructure Program.

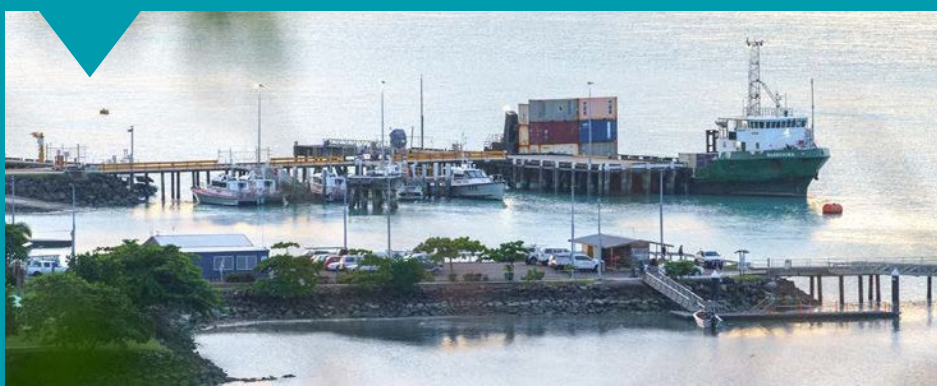
The Queensland Government has also committed to a **\$500,000** ferry maintenance package. We have worked with the school bus provider to implement free transport to and from school for all students on Thursday Island.

In addition, the Queensland Government is providing a community bus for people living on Thursday Island.

Active transport infrastructure, like shared bike and walking paths, reduces the cost of transport and improves health outcomes. We are working with local councils to build more than **3.7 kilometres** of shared paths on Thursday Island.

We are also addressing cost of living pressures by removing the requirement for people living in the Far North to purchase permits when using their vehicle outside of a restricted area for more than seven days.

**Going forward:** We will work with local councils and the Federal Government to identify marine infrastructure priorities and make every effort to build the skills and capability of the region throughout the delivery of the Torres Strait Islands Marine Infrastructure Program.



# Freight services

Removing barriers and supporting delivery of freight services.



The Queensland Government has committed to invest:

- **\$52.6 million** for a remote freight subsidy
- **\$5.3 million** to trial dedicated freight coordinators
- **\$6.5 million** towards a Remote and Regional Infrastructure Fund.

The Queensland Government is investing more than **\$64 million** over the next five years to target freight disadvantage in the Torres Strait, as well as Cape York, Gulf and the Northern Peninsula area.

By subsidising some of the freight costs, pressure is eased on local suppliers and reduces one of the major factors that makes food, clothing, fuel, and other essentials

more expensive in the region. This is our way of making sure people living in remote areas don't disproportionately feel the cost of living burden, and that everyone in our state has the opportunity to thrive.

**Going forward:** We will work with the community to determine how this **\$64 million** investment in freight funds is best used to deliver positive outcomes for the region.

# Energy

Supporting energy efficiency and energy savings measures.

The Queensland Government has committed to invest:

- **\$1 million** to upgrade the power network and quadruple solar capacity on Thursday Island
- **\$3 million** into the PowerSavvy program for education and awareness
- **\$7 million** to upgrade street lights to LED in Ergon-supplied isolated First Nations communities, which will reduce costs for councils.

We understand the challenges presented by rising energy prices and the flow-on impacts this has for remote communities such as the Torres Strait Islands and Northern Peninsula Area.

To address this, we are providing relief through bill rebates, increasing energy literacy, advancing renewable energy solutions, and retaining public ownership of Queensland's energy system. Ergon is refurbishing the wind turbines on Thursday Island to keep them powering well into the next decade. These actions will help to lower the cost to supply power in the region.

We will work to transition communities away from existing diesel generation and invest in renewable energy solutions such as solar and wind.

To help achieve this, we will co-design the development of the Remote and First Nations Clean Energy Strategy with remote and First Nations communities and the Federal Government.

We have also tasked Energy Queensland to update its Isolated

Network Strategy and complete feasibility studies to decarbonise its isolated power stations.

All of these steps will help to address energy resilience and make sure communities can benefit from the energy transformation. We will ensure genuine community engagement is at the heart of the transition.

**Going forward:** We will work with the local community, local councils and the Federal Government to develop targeted solutions and achieve our ambitious renewable energy and emissions targets, such as through the Remote and First Nations Clean Energy Strategy.

We will continue to take action to address the issues we heard at the Summit, including working with Energy Queensland to commence the roll-out of LED streetlights, and develop and deliver on the Remote and First Nations Energy Strategy to decarbonise communities to address the challenges of climate change.

We will also consider a pathway for solar on public housing in Ergon-supplied isolated communities.







# Housing

Responding to housing stress and discussing priorities for a new *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Action Plan*.

The issue of housing and housing supply is fundamentally important to any discussion about cost of living.

The Queensland Government has committed to increasing social housing on Thursday Island and Horn Island by building up to **12 additional social housing properties**, which is an investment of approximately **\$10 million**. This will include a mix of property types, with technical and design work occurring during 2023.

These projects are in addition to the priorities that communities in the region have identified in their Local Housing Plans, and the new social housing, extensions and land lots being delivered by local councils through the **\$40 million** Interim Remote Capital Program and **\$105 million** Forward Remote Capital Programs. The Queensland Government will also support home ownership opportunities across communities and on Thursday Island and Horn Island through the sale of up to **10 social housing properties** to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants in an initial round of this program.

*Going forward:* We will consider how to remove barriers to land development and encourage home ownership. We will look at rent, housing design and standards for social housing construction. We will also examine the potential for a new stand-alone housing authority, as well as the impact of government employee accommodation on housing needs in communities.

# Food security

**Improving availability, access and storage of food and beverages.**

It is clear from the community that local food production should be based on local knowledge and know-how. In recognition of this, we are on track to deliver a Local Food Security Strategy for the region by the end of June 2023.

We will consult with a local committee and the community to develop the Strategy, and to identify the key priorities and enablers required to create positive, lasting and systemic change for food security in the region, and the approach we need to take to get there.

The Queensland Government's **\$64 million** commitment to target freight disadvantage will also support food security in the region.

*Going forward:* We will work with the local community to develop a Local Food Security Strategy by the end of June 2023.

# Delivering on our commitments

**The Queensland Government is committed to delivering on the actions agreed at the Summit and outlined in this report.**

It is acknowledged that implementation and further progression of many initiatives will require genuine consultation between the local community and the local, state and federal levels of government.

The delivery of each action or initiative agreed at the Summit will be led by the responsible state Minister.

One way the Queensland Government will continue to engage with the communities of the Torres Strait Islands and Northern Peninsula Area, including on the status of the initiatives agreed at this Summit, will be through its regular Regional Community Forums.

