



TORRES SHIRE COUNCIL

To lead, provide & facilitate a safe, sustainable and culturally vibrant community

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MEDIA RELEASE

TORRES SHIRE COUNCIL – MASIG STATEMENT

MALUNGU YANGU WAKAY

‘THE VOICE FROM THE DEEP’

As part of the 85th Anniversary celebrations of the First Island Councillors Conference that took place on Masig Island on 23rd August 1937, the Masig Statement was signed and released. “This was a momentous event”, observed the Mayor of Torres Shire Council, Cr. Yen Loban. “the Masig Statement is the beginning of a new beginning, a culturally united path to regional sovereignty. It connects our past to the present, and the present to our future. It is the link that joins the heroic work of our forebears at the First Island Councillors Conference and their aspiration for self-government to our aspiration for self-determination today. It enshrines our culture. It respects our history. It secures our independent future”.

The Masig Statement seeks to achieve self-determination for the peoples of the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area, to freely determine our political status and to freely pursue our economic, social and cultural development. In exercising our right to self-determination, we have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to our internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions. Therefore, we will create partnerships with Key Regional Stakeholders, the Queensland and Australian governments together with other relevant organisations to better equip us to work together to achieve our regional goals and aspirations; and in working together as peoples of the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area obtain and safeguard our human rights enshrined in international, national and Queensland law.

The 85th Anniversary Regional Celebrations hosted by Torres Strait Island Regional Council were held over 2 days at Yorke Island (Masig) commencing with our leaders providing contextual background on the history of Torres Strait Islanders and our fight for self-determination and self-governance.

Torres Shire Council CEO, Mrs Dalassa Yorkston, like others who were part of this historic event and who was a signatory to both the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the Masig Statement noted, “2022 is a very significant year. It is the year the Prime Minister of Australia announced the Federal Government’s formal support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart and enshrining the Voice into the Australian Constitution. Prime Minister Albanese has now announced a possible timetable and starting point. It is the 30th anniversary of Mabo. It is the 30th anniversary of the Torres Strait Islander Flag. It is the 85th Anniversary of the first Councillors Conference at Masig. It is the year that the Queensland Government announced the Tracks to Treaty”.



Mrs Yorkston observed; “When I read the Minutes from the First Island Councillors Conference in 1937 and then when signing the Masig Statement on Tuesday 23rd August 2022, I was humbled and in awe. In 1937, the Councillors called for a new code of local representation, systems of wage regulation, the right to work, to own and crew boats, for the removal of unpopular bylaws (including the evening curfews). Let us not forget these demands were shaped by our dispossessed forebears, who were not even counted in the Census; who, without access to any of the resources we have today, through the effort of their own intellects and wills designed the pillars upon which we signed the Masig Statement”.

Mrs Yorkston continued “Two years after the conference, the Queensland Government passed the *Torres Strait Islander Act 1939*, which incorporated many of the recommendations discussed at the conference and recognised Torres Strait islanders as separate peoples” Mrs Yorkston noted, “We now have legally enshrined local governments across the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula with legal powers – powers of general competence – unimaginable in 1937. It was also wonderful to have our Member for Cook, Ms Cynthia Lui MP and Queensland Senator Nita Green MP on Masig to witness and be part of this historic occasion”.

Mayor Loban said, “Torres Shire Council calls upon the Queensland and Commonwealth governments to support the peoples of the Shire and region in achieving our ambition, and our forebears’ ambition, for self-determination and regional sovereignty, by the 100th anniversary of the first Councillors conference in 15 years’ time – the 23rd August 2037. We have come together as a region. We have agreed a path forward. We have signed the Masig Statement that supports the aspirations of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Now the hard work begins. The Masig Statement will travel throughout the Torres Strait, NPA and within the Torres Shire Council’s footprint, all community members will have an opportunity to sign the statement commemorating the 85th Anniversary of the First Island Councillors Conference”.

Mayor Loban concluded, “On behalf of Torres Shire Council, we call on the Torres Shire community to come along and stand by Council to support the Masig Statement. To support enshrining the Voice in the Australian constitution at the upcoming referendum, and to support your elected members in achieving the future imagined and fought for by our leaders in 1937 and ever since. Finally, Torres Shire Council would like to express our sincere appreciation and thanks to Mayor Philemon Mosby and the Torres Strait Island Regional Council, Cr. Hilda Mosby, Divisional Councillor and the Masig Community for your gracious hospitality and for hosting this historic occasion. Mina Big Eso to Mayor Mosby, Mayor Yusia, and respective Councillors for working in collaboration and partnership towards the development of the Masig Statement”.

End Release.

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