

**Meeting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mayors
Queensland Minister for Housing and Public Works**

Thursday, 20 April 2017

COMMUNIQUE

Housing, and the employment and apprenticeships which housing construction delivers, are making a vital contribution to Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, providing real jobs, skills and economic development.

Ongoing investment in housing is critical to meeting Queensland's *Closing the Gap* targets for improved employment, education and health. More housing is needed in Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, to address population growth and continued overcrowding.

This progress is coming under threat in Queensland, due to the current uncertainty around future Federal funding commitments for housing in remote Indigenous communities.

Mayors and other leaders from Queensland's sixteen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Local Governments, together with the State Government and Torres Shire Council, are now calling on the Federal Government to make a commitment to continue funding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing in the upcoming Federal Budget.

Queensland has led the way in delivering under NPARIH and NPRH and is on track to deliver 1,141 new dwellings and significant upgrades to 1,490 dwellings in Queensland, by June 2018.

Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander local governments have also now developed local planning schemes which sets them up for future development. This provides the base to deliver against the significant demand of at least an additional 1,800 to 2,000 new houses needed to address housing pressures due to population growth and continued overcrowding.

Importantly, Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander local governments now deliver over 70 per cent of all housing construction projects in their local communities – a huge gain from the historic norm of only 10 per cent of this work being local delivered.

However, all Federal funding for this remote Indigenous housing programs is due to completely cease in June 2018.

Uncertainty about whether funding will continue in future is putting at risk the ability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander local governments to retain skilled workers in communities. This is unacceptable and jeopardises the future economic and social growth of Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Today, the Queensland Government and the State's 16 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Local Governments have united in a call to the Australian Government for funding certainty beyond June 2018 to support better housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

We also call on the Australian Government to include and adequately fund Cherbourg, Yarrabah and Torres Shire Council as a part of a new agreement. These disadvantaged communities face the same challenges as other remote communities but are not recognised under the current agreement, and are ready to engage in more housing projects supported by a rolling capital program from 2018.

Queensland's priorities are to protect the achievements made under the NPARIH and NPRH, and meet future need.

Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are looking to capitalise on the opportunity for economic growth, social, community development and employment outcomes that are delivered under the agreements, which are a vital contribution to communities through skills development and real jobs.

To further strengthen Queensland's performance, Mayors and the Queensland Government agreed to cut the time needed to approve new housing construction in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by 16 weeks, to jointly identify demand for housing in communities and how this is negotiated with the Australian Government, including a series of other priority actions.

There is a need for sustained investment from all levels of government to build upon the strong foundations built through current agreements.

The current uncertainty around future funding arrangements to address housing need in remote Indigenous communities is unacceptable and is jeopardising the future economic and social growth of our communities. Future funding certainty is needed to meet urgent housing need and address the significant consequences of overcrowding, including negative impacts on health, education and other social outcomes for our communities.

We ask the Australian Government to respond swiftly to our call for certainty and action to ensure the critical pipeline of construction and jobs is maintained and important work can commence to prepare land and infrastructure.

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