



Steven Miles

DEPUTY PREMIER OF QUEENSLAND

WORKING TOGETHER FOR QUEENSLAND

19 October 2020

Mr Paul Wright
National Director
ANTaR
PO Box 77
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

By email: paul@antar.org.au

Dear Mr Wright

Thank you for your letter of 1 October 2020 regarding our policy commitments in the 2020 Queensland election. The Palaszczuk Labor Government's strong health response to the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that we can now start to deliver our plan for economic recovery. I'm pleased to outline the ways in which the Palaszczuk Labor Government is partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to deliver better outcomes in health, education, housing, social justice and cultural heritage for the First Nations people of Queensland.

First Nations COVID-19 Response

The Palaszczuk Labor Government recognised that Queensland's First Nations people are at increased risk of COVID-19 and that is why, in consultation with community leadership, strict travel restrictions were put in place quickly. The Government allocated liaison officers to work with Local Disaster Management Groups across the state to ensure the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders were front and centre. This rapid response and the strong leadership in Queensland's remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities has resulted in there being no cases of COVID-19 in any community.

In contrast, while the Palaszczuk Government was focused on the safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities the LNP were running a campaign to open Queensland borders, putting those very communities at risk.

The Palaszczuk Labor Government established the First Nations COVID-19 team to provide a targeted health response for First Nations people who are particularly vulnerable to the adverse impact from COVID-19. The team has developed and published culturally appropriate health promotion messages and information on when and how to access COVID testing.

In addition, guidelines for Hospital and Health Services to deliver First Nations Testing and Preparedness, Community Outbreak Plans and Communications strategies have been developed and published. These guidelines and communications have been developed in partnership with Health Consumers Qld, Institute for Urban Indigenous Health and the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council.

Weekly consultation with the Mayors of the remote and discrete communities, Commonwealth Health and the National Indigenous Australians Advisory Agency has informed the Chief Health Officer decisions in relation to the protection of the communities.

The Queensland Government targeted more than \$21 million to ensure seamless access to high quality, culturally safe primary health care and specialist services for First Nations Queenslanders during our COVID-19 Pandemic response. This is in addition to other targeted investment in communications, HHS SMS capability, and partnerships between Hospital and Health Services and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled health sector in Queensland.

The response focuses on boosting the frontline health workforce, new models of care to safely treat those with existing health conditions, and early identification and management for those who test positive to COVID-19.

Treaty

Path to Treaty is a once in a lifetime opportunity to reframe the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders and non-Indigenous Queenslanders and the Palaszczuk Labor Government is committed this process. It aims to recognise and accept our shared history, and create a more just and fair future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people to walk together on this path.

Establishing a treaty or agreement making process - based on mutual understanding, respect and recognition - with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders will be fundamental to improving life outcomes for the first peoples of this state. Treaty will give First Nations people a platform to negotiate improved policies, programs and services for communities.

During this term of government, the Palaszczuk Labor Government delivered on our commitment to formalise a process to progress a path to treaty. A process that provided an opportunity for all Queenslanders to have their voices heard.

Commencing in 2019 with an expert Eminent Panel and Treaty Working Group, the Queensland Government accepted or accepted in principle all the recommendations of the Eminent Panel and tabled its commitment to Path to Treaty in Parliament in August 2020.

It is disappointing that the LNP declined an offer to nominate a member to the eminent panel and their Shadow Spokesperson didn't attend a single consultation session.

A re-elected Palaszczuk Labor Government will establish a Treaty Advancement Committee to advance the Path to Treaty process with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and provide expert advice and guidance to government on options to advance the treaty process.

While we know we have a long road ahead of us, we are inspired by the way treaty can enrich our lives and the lives of future generations of all Queenslanders.

The Path to Treaty builds on a number of Queensland Labor-led initiatives that set the foundation for a new and just relationship. They include:

- honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians in the preamble of the Queensland Constitution in 2010
- the Queensland Government Reconciliation Action Plan 2018-2021
- acknowledging the importance of self-determination and protecting the distinct cultural rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Queensland's Human Rights Act 2019
- legally recognising traditional Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices through the Meriba Omasker Kaziw Kazipa Act 2020, introduced into the Queensland Parliament by the first

Torres Strait Islander to be elected to any Australian Parliament, passed on 8 September 2020 and assented to on 14 September 2020

- creating key leadership roles and increasing the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on government boards and committees, including for example, the appointment of the First Nations Advisor for Housing, the appointment of the first Chief Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Officer, and the establishment of the Queensland First Children and Families Board.

Stolen Wages

The Palaszczuk Labor Government acknowledges the impacts of past policies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders and is committed to righting historic wrongs.

In response to a representative proceeding lodged by Mr Hans Pearson in the Federal Court on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, living and deceased, who were subject to the Protection Acts, the Palaszczuk Government reached a settlement agreement of \$190 million.

Our government worked with the Applicant's legal representatives to progress the settlement in an expedient manner. The settlement and arrangements for its administration were confirmed by orders of the Federal Court on 17 January 2020. The Federal Court appointed Grant Thornton Australia to administer the Settlement Distribution Scheme. The settlement was reached in the spirit of reconciliation, in recognition of the legacy and impact of the 'control' policies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders, and mindful of those who have since passed and those who are ageing.

This settlement is in addition to reparations of \$55.4 million funded through a fund established in 2002, and a further \$21 million provided through the Stolen Wages and Savings Reparations Scheme, following a commitment made during the 2015 Queensland election.

The Palaszczuk Labor Government has also been working to address other legacy issues including acknowledgement of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander peoples' contribution to the wealth and development of Queensland, resolution of past government home ownership programs and reframing the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the Queensland Government.

Closing the Gap

The Palaszczuk Labor Government is committed to improving life outcomes for First Nations Queenslanders. During this term, we partnered with Australian Governments and the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations to finalise the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The agreement includes 16 targets, double the number set in 2008, to improve outcomes in education, employment, social and emotional well-being, language preservation and housing as well as reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the criminal justice and child safety systems and preventing domestic and family violence.

In August of this year the Palaszczuk Government made a commitment to support the implementation of the new national Closing the Gap agreement, with \$9.3 million as part of a national joint funding effort with the federal government and other states and territories. Importantly, it sees Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people play the lead role in decision-making and reflects the Queensland Government's commitment to significant reforms towards reframing the relationship in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We know that when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are involved in determining their own futures, we see positive results and this investment in building an effective community-controlled sector will be critical to improving life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

○ **Health**

Last year we welcomed Queensland's very first Chief Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Officer to lead the newly created Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Division. This role was created after years of advocacy from groups including the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council.

It marks a historic change for the Queensland Government in its approach to improve the health equity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders. The Division has been instrumental to embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in Queensland Health leadership, governance and workforce, as well as embedding cultural capability in the planning, design and delivery of health services.

The Palaszczuk Labor Government understands that investing in the health of mothers and babies is key to gaining long term sustainable improvements in the health and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In November 2019 the Palaszczuk Government launched the *Growing Deadly Families Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Maternity Services Strategy 2019-2025* (the Strategy) to provide a roadmap for the provision of culturally safe and effective maternity services across Queensland, developed and delivered in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Activities within the Strategy have already commenced and are currently being utilised by Hospital and Health Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Services.

On 13 August 2020 the Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2020 was passed in Queensland Parliament. The Bill is a key plank in driving a health equity reform agenda by embedding a commitment to First Nations health equity in the Hospital and Health Boards Act 2011, requiring:

- each Hospital and Health Service (HHS) to develop a strategy to achieve health equity with First Nations people; and
- each Hospital and Health Board to have one or more Aboriginal persons and/or Torres Strait Islander persons as members.

We have introduced the first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Agreement. This agreement affirms the pivotal roles of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce, in collaboration with other health professions, to improve health outcomes for First Nations Queenslanders.

Our record is in contrast to the LNP who when last in government cut more than 150 jobs in nutrition, health promotion and indigenous health in Queensland, not to mention cutting \$36.4 million in annual funding from 153 health service projects run by Non-Government Organisations.

○ **Education**

The Palaszczuk Labor Government is proud of our achievements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education which has been aimed at building partnerships and programs to boost the engagement and outcomes to provide pathways to further education and employment.

Queensland has achieved significant progress in early childhood and schooling outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. In 2019, 98.1% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander state school Year 12 completers achieved either a Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) or Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement (QCIA). The gap in Queensland certification continues to be less than 1 [0.2] percentage point.

We are supporting schools to develop and deliver language programs in collaboration with their local communities and aligned to the Australian Curriculum's Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages. There are now approximately 80 state schools in Queensland offering or developing a First Nations language program, covering 27 unique Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

The Building Cultural Capability initiative consists of a set of tools and resources that support schools to effectively communicate and interact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families. Increasing the cultural capability of teachers and their capacity to deliver the Australian Curriculum supports increased engagement, attendance and achievement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The Solid Pathways program is a suite of initiatives for high-achieving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from Years 4–12 across Queensland. Solid Pathways supports students to improve their academic outcomes, increase the number of students achieving ATAR scores equivalent to OP 1-10, and support transitions to tertiary studies.

We are increasing the engagement, participation and achievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in STEM through a number of initiatives, including partnering with universities and participating in programs that link traditional knowledge and values to modern environmental science concepts.

- **Justice**

The Palaszczuk Labor Government is proud to have reintroduced the Murri Court after it was abolished by the former LNP government.

Murri Court links Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander defendants to cultural and support services to help them make changes in their lives and stop offending. Elders or Respected Persons from the community are in the courtroom to guide and encourage defendants, and help magistrates understand more about defendants' personal and cultural circumstances.

The Murri Court is assisted by Community Justice Groups (CJGs). CJGs are run by members of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and provide a community-based response to local issues, working cooperatively with magistrates, police, corrective services personnel and staff from other government agencies and community organisations. CJGs adopt a person-centred approach to addressing crime and justice-related issues in their community utilising cultural leadership and capability to contribute to whole of system outcomes.

When last in Government, the LNP also abolished the Drug Court, which the Palaszczuk Labor Government has since reintroduced. The reintroduced Drug and Alcohol Court treats offenders with a severe substance use disorder contributing to their offending behaviour. The Queensland Drug and Alcohol Court targets adult offenders to be supervised and undertake treatment to address their drug and/or alcohol dependency issues and criminal offending.

A re-elected Palaszczuk Labor Government will retain Courts, like the Murri Court and the Drug and Alcohol Court, that act to break the cycle of offending.

The Palaszczuk Labor Government commits to the retention of the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council (QSAC). QSAC was abolished by the LNP when they were last in Government. As part of QSAC, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Panel was established to give a stronger voice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, a better sense of how Queensland communities are affected by current sentencing, and insight into what changes might be made to improve outcomes.

The LNP have already indicated that they will introduce a “three-strike policy” which research has shown disproportionately affects First Nations Peoples. A re-elected Palaszczuk Government will maintain the principle of imprisonment as a last resort (except for sexual offending against children and for offences that result in physical harm to another person).

- **Policing**

The Queensland Police Service (QPS) Cultural Capability Action plan articulates the Palaszczuk Government’s commitment to advance reconciliation and to further strengthen and acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians.

The QPS Cultural Engagement Unit establishes and maintains contact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to develop a strategic partnership that provides an effective and culturally sensitive policing service.

The Cultural Engagement unit also provides an advisory and consultancy service to QPS personnel in relation to conflicts, incidents and concerns in relation to Indigenous communities and operational support to all QPS officers in investigations or inquiries involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons with an emphasis on intelligence, cultural awareness and linguistic support.

We will continue to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in prison to reintegrate with their communities and break the cycle of reoffending. One example of our commitment was providing a new minibus to transport Elders to several north Queensland correctional centres and help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners stay connected to their communities.

Support available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners in custody has come a long way in Queensland under the Palaszczuk Labor Government. We are actively working with Elder groups and First People’s Chaplaincy Services to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners across Queensland.

Another example of our commitment in this area is the Murrighagun Cultural Centre which we established in 2017 to provide advisory, planning and support services to Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) officers and relevant prisoners and promotes staff participation in culturally significant events. In partnership with QCS Indigenous officers and external persons, Murrighagun Cultural Centre also delivers the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health First Aid program and cultural awareness training to QCS staff and is leading a review of the QCS cultural understanding package.

Cultural development officers, cultural advisors, and cultural liaison officers across correctional centres in Queensland provide support and guidance to prisoners and cultural advice to staff. The Palaszczuk Labor Government is continuing to expand its existing suite of rehabilitation programs, developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

A key aspect of our commitment to reframing the relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders will be to reduce the over representation of First Nations people in detention. Through the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap the Queensland Government has committed to justice targets that focus on reducing incarceration rates. While even one death in

custody is one too many, over the last few years we are seeing a decline in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody.

- **Housing**

The Palaszczuk Labor Government is committed to ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to adequate and sustainable housing. Our government is partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to strengthen decision making and enable community-led, place-based responses through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Action Plan 2019 – 2023. These partnerships will set a platform for the distribution and roll-out of future funding, ensuring local communities are empowered to make decisions so that funding achieves the best possible local outcomes. The 2019-20 Queensland budget included over \$228 million in funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing funding.

The Palaszczuk Labor Government is providing pathways to safe, secure and sustainable housing for vulnerable Queenslanders through its ambitious \$1.8 billion Queensland Housing Strategy 2017 – 2027. The Queensland Housing Strategy includes \$1.6 billion for the successful Housing Construction Jobs Program which will deliver over 5,500 social housing and affordable homes by 2027. This program has already exceeded its first three-year target with over 1,949 projects commenced, of which more than a thousand have already been completed.

In a Queensland first, in 2018 the Palaszczuk Labor Government appointed human rights advocate and Gangulu man, Mick Gooda to the role of First Nations Housing Advisor. Mick Gooda is helping the Government work hand-in-hand with local communities to improve housing outcomes through strengthening and enabling community-led, place-based responses to housing needs.

Following the expiry of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPRH) 2016 - 2018 agreement between the Commonwealth and State Governments the Palaszczuk Labor Government announced a \$40 million interim remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing program. Each of the 16 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander local government authorities and the Torres Shire local government authority will receive \$2.35 million to invest in local housing priorities. This funding will deliver up to 49 new houses, 50 two-bedroom extensions and 35 lot developments for future housing construction across all former NPRH communities, as well as Cherbourg, Yarrabah and the Torres Shire Area that did not receive any funding under the NPRH.

In September 2020, the Honourable Mick de Brenni MP, Minister for Housing and Public Works, Minister for Sport and Minister for Digital Technology met with Mayors from across Queensland's remote and discrete communities to discuss progress under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Action Plan, identify the next steps for distributing federal funding, as well as the Queensland Government's investment. Following that meeting the Government is now working with Councils as they identify capital works priorities for their individual communities. These capital works priorities will provide the basis for broader place-based Local Housing Plans, which will be community led, and will address the full spectrum of housing issues and options, from homelessness to home ownership. The Queensland Government is committed to working hand-in-hand with communities, working openly and collaboratively, to get housing right.

Cultural Heritage

In 2019, the Palaszczuk Labor Government commenced a review of the *Queensland Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003* and *Torres Strait Islander Cultural Heritage Act 2003*. The review aims to ensure the legislation is still operating as intended to achieve outcomes for, and with, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

State-wide consultation, as part of the review process, included a public consultation paper to seek feedback on a number of areas about the legislation.

Public consultation has now closed, and the government is currently considering the next steps, including the current 'last claim standing' provision and options for further consultation if required.

A re-elected Palaszczuk Labor Government will finalise the review of the Cultural Heritage Acts with a view to ensure that the legislation is consistent with the broader objective to reframe the relationship, and that they continue to protect and conserve Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage, while facilitating business and development activity that is vital to our State.

On Indigenous Literacy Day, the Palaszczuk Government announced the *Many Voices: Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Policy* to help preserve, promote and revitalise languages of the world's oldest living cultures.

This Palaszczuk Government language policy is another significant step towards a reframed relationship with First Nations people. The policy, the first of its kind in Queensland, has been developed in partnership with representatives of various Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language groups and acknowledges the ongoing impact of historic practices that separated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and prohibited people from speaking their own language.

The Palaszczuk Labor Government is also growing the Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger Program and committed an additional \$8 million over four years in the 2017-2018 budget to increase the number of ranger positions to more than 100 across 24 communities in Queensland. Through the recent release of the Queensland Protected Area Strategy, the Palaszczuk Government has committed to further \$24 million to double the number of Indigenous Land and Sea Rangers to 200.

The Palaszczuk Labor Government acknowledges the true and ancient history of Queensland, reconciling the past and fostering a future of shared pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island heritage and culture. The First Nations Naming Project, announced recently, is identifying national parks across Queensland for possible renaming in First Nations languages. One of the first locations to be considered is Cape Upstart National Park, proposed to be renamed 'Budgenerra', in the language of the Juru Native Title holders.

This project is a positive step in our truth telling around First Nations Peoples' significant and ancient connection to country.

Finally, the Gurra Gurra Integrated First Nations Engagement Framework 2020-2026 (the Framework) has been designed to support staff in delivering on the Department of Environment and Science (DES) Strategic Plan and establish DES as a better practice agency in its work with First Nations people. The Framework aligns with the Palaszczuk Governments objective to reframe our relationship with First Nations peoples and support our commitment to advance self-determination by recognising the rights and interests of First Nations peoples.

The Palaszczuk Labor Government is committed to righting the relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders to deliver better economic, employment, health and housing outcomes for the First Nations people. This is in direct contrast to the LNP who don't have a plan when it comes to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The LNP don't even mention Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their 40-page plan, and their last term in office is marked by cuts to jobs, social services and funding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Now is not the time to risk the LNP's cuts. Queensland's ongoing economic and health recovery requires leadership and stability, and Deb Frecklington and the LNP are a risk to our recovery.

I urge you to communicate this message with your members and supporters. Should the Palaszczuk Government be re-elected, we look forward to working with you for the benefit of all Queenslanders.

Yours sincerely



STEVEN MILES MP
Deputy Premier
Minister for Health
Minister for Ambulance Services