

5.8. SUPPORT FOR THE ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART

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RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. **Affirms and endorses the Uluru Statement from the Heart as part of Council's ongoing commitment to Reconciliation,**
2. **Acknowledges that the Statement calls for:**
 - a. **Recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were the first sovereign nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands; sovereignty that was never ceded and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown,**
 - b. **The establishment of a First Nations Voice to Parliament enshrined in the constitution, and**
 - c. **A Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making and truth-telling about our shared history, between governments and First Nations peoples, and**
3. **Makes this endorsement public through publication on Council's website and in writing to the Commonwealth Government.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The authors of the Uluru Statement from the Heart call it 'an invitation to the Australian people' and ask all '*Australians to accept our invitation to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.*'

The Uluru Statement calls for the establishment of a Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Constitution, and a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making and truth-telling about our history.

Council supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples having meaningful input into decisions that affect their lives and their futures and has resolved through Corporate and Operational Plans to develop and implement a Reconciliation Action Plan among other actions to recognise the wrongs done to our Indigenous community and to reconcile, so that we may all benefit from and enjoy our Shire.

Douglas Shire Council will join other local governments across Australia in endorsing the Uluru Statement from the Heart as part of a commitment to reconciliation between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians.

BACKGROUND

The Uluru Statement from the Heart was issued in May 2017, by delegates to the First Nations National Constitutional Convention, at Uluru on the lands of the Anangu people. The statement was signed by over 250 delegates from across Australia.

The Statement seeks constitutional change and calls for a Voice to Parliament to be enshrined in the Constitution of Australia. A Voice would be a body to advise on law and policy to the Parliament and the Government of the Day.

The Statement also calls for a Makarrata Commission to oversee a process of truth-telling about our history and to facilitate a process of agreement-making. Makarrata is a Yolngu word meaning the coming together after a struggle, a treaty.

Many local governments across Australia and Queensland have begun endorsing and adopting the principles of the Statement.

A copy of the Uluru Statement from the Heart is provided as Attachment 1.

COMMENTS

The Statement is regarded as a significant moment in the ongoing campaign for recognition and reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians.

Council articulates in the Corporate Plan 2019 – 2024, Theme 1:

Douglas Shire Council embraces the diversity of our communities and values the contribution that all people make to the Shire.

- *We recognise that it is a core strength of the region.*
- *We acknowledge our past so that it may guide us in the future.*
- *We recognise the wrongs done to our Indigenous community and we actively seek to reconcile so that we may all benefit from and enjoy our Shire.*

Council supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples having meaningful input into decisions that affect their lives and their futures and commits to maintaining and strengthening our partnerships and respectful relationships with Bama, the traditional rainforest Aboriginal coastal peoples of our region, so that we can increase the opportunities for successful and positive outcomes to the advantage of everyone in our communities.

Council's Corporate Plan envisages a community in which everyone feels a sense of belonging. The vision highlights:

'the need to protect what we have while acknowledging our past. In honouring its past, Council values the contributions all groups have made and recognises our Traditional Owners as the original custodians of the land. We acknowledge the wrongs done in the past and we seek to reconcile for the future. We believe that only through understanding and honouring our past can we move forward to protect and enjoy all that we have today for all people'.

Council seeks to promote reconciliation and embrace the benefits of the diversity of our communities through resolving to develop a Reconciliation Action Plan and build stronger engagement with Traditional Owner bodies and individuals through the employment of a Community Development Officer (First Peoples).

The Australian Government has committed to bring a referendum to the Australian people before the end of 2023, to allow changes to the constitution to enshrine a First Nations Voice. The Uluru Statement and a Voice to Parliament has been endorsed by many local governments across Australia.

PROPOSAL

That Council:

1. Affirms and endorses the Uluru Statement from the Heart as part of Council's ongoing commitment to Reconciliation,
2. Acknowledges that the Statement calls for:
 - a. Recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were the first sovereign nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands; sovereignty that was never ceded and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown,
 - b. The establishment of a First Nations Voice to Parliament enshrined in the constitution, and
 - c. A Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making and truth-telling about our shared history, between governments and First Nations peoples, and
3. Makes this endorsement public through publication on Council's website and in writing to the Commonwealth Government.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial requirements of this action.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Council may face reputational risk with a section of the community by taking a stance on an issue outside the direct purview of local government.

Council may equally face reputational risk with another section of the community by not taking a stance on an issue of national importance.

Each of these risks can be mitigated by clearly communicating Council's rationale in making a decision on this issue.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic: A Voice to Parliament would give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples a greater say in the laws and policies that affect them, which may lead to increased economic development and participation in the economy.

Environmental: Greater involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in environmental decision-making may lead to better resource and land management, and environmental stewardship.

Social: Greater input into decision-making and promotion of truth-telling and reconciliation intends to address and improve the ongoing social and cultural impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

CORPORATE/OPERATIONAL PLAN, POLICY REFERENCE

This report has been prepared in accordance with the following:

Corporate Plan 2019-2024 Initiatives:

Theme 1 - Celebrating Our Communities

Douglas Shire Council embraces the diversity of our communities and values the contribution that all people make to the Shire. We recognise that it is a core strength of the region. We acknowledge our past so that it may guide us in the future. We recognise the wrongs done to our Indigenous community and we actively seek to reconcile so that we may all benefit from and enjoy our Shire. We acknowledge early European settlers who forged an agricultural base for our economy and we welcome all new arrivals as part of our broader community.

Goal 1 - We will celebrate the diversity of our community and ensure that all infrastructure, programs, and services are underpinned with inclusiveness and accessibility.

Operational Plan 2022-2023 Actions:

New project arisen during the financial year.

COUNCIL'S ROLE

Council can play a number of different roles in certain circumstances and it is important to be clear about which role is appropriate for a specific purpose or circumstance. The implementation of actions will be a collective effort and Council's involvement will vary from information only through to full responsibility for delivery.

The following areas outline where Council has a clear responsibility to act:

Advocate Council makes representation on behalf of the community on important issues, funding opportunities, projects and programs. Council will use its influence to seek the best outcomes for the community.

CONSULTATION

Internal: Discussed with Councillors at a workshop on 21 March 2023.

External: Discussed with the FNQROC Mayors at a meeting on 2 February 2023.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Nil

ATTACHMENTS

1. Uluru Statement from the Heart [5.8.1 - 1 page]

ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART

We, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the southern sky, make this statement from the heart:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from ‘time immemorial’, and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

This sovereignty is *a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or ‘mother nature’, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty.* It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia’s nationhood.

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is *the torment of our powerlessness.*

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take *a rightful place* in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: *the coming together after a struggle.* It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.