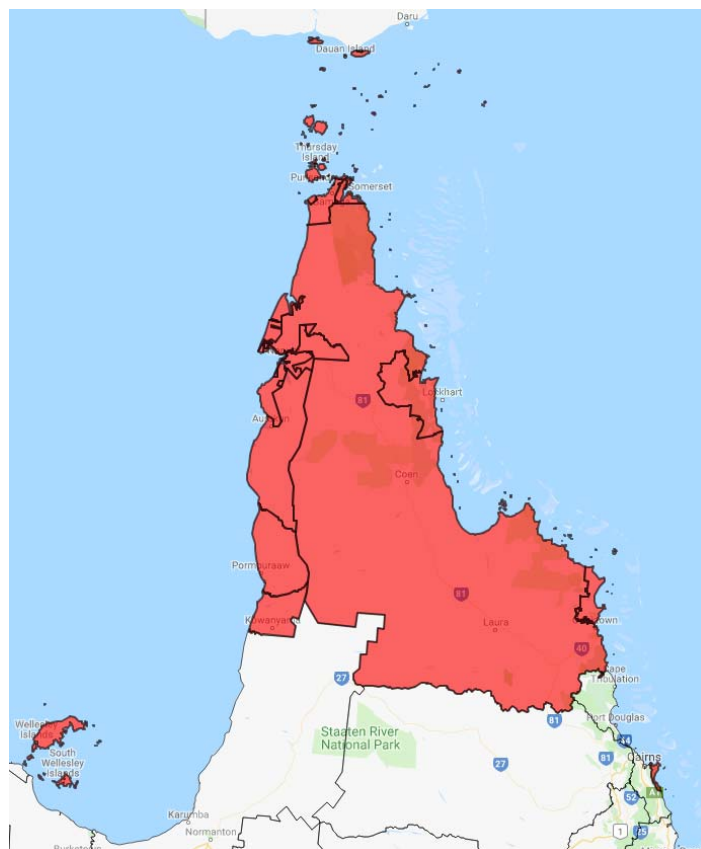# 2019 FEDERAL ELECTION PRIORITIES

Our Priorities – a summary

- **An immediate commitment to remote Indigenous housing** to address overcrowding, homelessness, poor housing conditions and severe housing shortages in remote communities.

- **Restore Financial Assistance Grants** to 1 percent of Commonwealth taxation revenue.

- **A commitment to fully seal the Peninsula Development Road** to connect communities to economic, social and cultural opportunities.

- **Better telecommunications and digital connectivity** to maximise economic, social, cultural, health and education benefits in our communities.

- **Deal with the impacts of climate change** through mitigation works and a consistent national policy on addressing climate change.

- **Increase the resilience of public infrastructure and assets** to natural disaster events and ensure local governments are not worse off under new disaster relief and recovery arrangements.

- **Lower the cost of insurance** for Torres Strait, Cape and Gulf communities and make insurance more accessible to local governments, businesses and homeowners.

- **Grow a strong and sustainable tourism industry** in the Torres Strait, Cape and Gulf regions through business development, marketing and promotion for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

- **A renewed focus on growing Northern Australia,** including addressing social disadvantage, and allocating funding for programs and initiatives to build the capacity of Indigenous people in communities by supporting new business opportunities and the economic participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

- **A review of Commonwealth service delivery** in remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to better meet community expectations and deliver good value for money.

- **Genuine partnerships with local government** in the co-design of policies and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

About us

The Torres Cape Indigenous Council Alliance is a membership-based regional organisation of councils which represents 12 of Queensland's 16 Indigenous local governments, as well as Torres Shire Council, Cook Shire Council and Weipa Town Authority. Centred largely in the Torres Strait, Cape and Gulf region, we operate as a collaborative partnership of councils to represent the common interests of local governing bodies within the region. Our members are committed to working together with the State and Federal governments to help shape place-based responses and solutions to the challenges and opportunities in front of us.

Regional Snapshot

- **131,177 km² total land area** – 13% of Queensland
- **20%** of the total land area is **National Park** – or 25,660 km²
- **31,400 residents** – 0.6% of Queensland's total population
- **68.5% Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples**, compared to 4% for whole of Queensland
- **15 year gap in health adjusted life expectancy** compared to total Queensland population
- **91%** of the region is **Very Remote Australia or Remote Australia**
- **$1.476 billion** contribution to Queensland's **GRP**
- **Major industries** include mining, agriculture, public administration, health and education
- **Tourism** is a growth industry

Priority 1: Remote Indigenous housing

An immediate commitment to remote Indigenous housing to address overcrowding, homelessness, poor housing conditions and severe housing shortages in remote communities.

An ongoing commitment to remote Indigenous housing is of major importance to all TCICA members. While there has been significant progress in Queensland, with nearly 1,150 new homes built, 1,500 homes refurbished and 4,300 homes maintained, many communities are still experiencing severe overcrowding, and report that there can be up to 16 people sleeping in a three-bedroom house.

The Government's own Remote Housing Review in 2017 noted that an additional 5,500 homes are required by 2028 to reduce the levels of overcrowding in remote areas to acceptable levels.

It is no secret that overcrowding of housing is leading to poorer Indigenous health and well-being outcomes and limiting opportunities for the growth and development of Indigenous communities. Indigenous people living in our region already face a 15 year gap in health adjusted life expectancy compared to the total Queensland population. Access to safe and secure houses is critical if the disparity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the non-Indigenous population is to be closed and lives are to be improved for the long term.

The loss of ongoing funding for remote Indigenous housing can also be measured in the number of lost job opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Queensland Government data indicates that the program resulted in 850 jobs for Indigenous people, with Queensland leading the country in Indigenous employment outcomes. 87 percent of people employed for projects funded under the program were Indigenous, far exceeding the target set by the Commonwealth of 20 percent Indigenous employment. TCICA members themselves delivered more than 80 percent of housing construction projects.

The complete absence of any funding for remote Indigenous housing in the Morrison Government's 2019-20 Budget is extremely disappointing. The inability of the Australian and Queensland Governments to negotiate a new remote housing agreement is seriously undermining the work to date to address critical shortages in social housing in remote Indigenous communities and deliver new jobs and training opportunities for local people.

This situation simply cannot be allowed to continue.

We ask for your assurance that, if elected, your Party will negotiate with Queensland a new agreement within 100 days of the election, or immediately explore alternative options for the delivery of new housing in remote communities in partnership with local government.

Priority 2: Financial Assistance Grants

Restore Financial Assistance Grants to 1 percent of Commonwealth taxation revenue.

TCICA members wholly support the calls by the Australian Local Government Association and Local Government Association of Queensland for Financial Assistance Grants funding to reflect one percent of total Commonwealth revenue.

Environmental, climatic, social and economic challenges restrict the capacity for outback and remote councils to raise own source revenue. With limited or no rates base, the enormity of funding the cost of delivering services to a standard not lower than the average standard of other local governing bodies is apparent.

The relative decline in core federal funding to local government has reduced the capacity of TCICA members to develop and maintain services and infrastructure in our communities. Additional investment through local government is essential to help maintain the living standards of people living, working and doing business in the Torres Strait, Cape and Gulf region.

We ask for your commitment to restoring Financial Assistance Grants to at least one percent of Commonwealth taxation revenue so that local councils can meet the increasing costs of delivering local government services in their communities.

Priority 3: Cape York Regional Package

A commitment to fully seal the Peninsula Development Road to connect communities to economic, social and cultural opportunities.

The TCICA welcomes the Morrison Government's pre-budget announcement of $190 million for the second of three stages of the Peninsula Development Road sealing program. Around 208 kilometres currently remains unsealed.

While the second tranche of funding will help connect Weipa and remote Indigenous communities to essential services and remove barriers to economic development, it is not until the entire road is sealed that communities will fully benefit from reduced living costs, new jobs and investment.

Despite the announcement in December 2015 of $10 million in funding for a bridge over the Jardine River, we are still waiting for this project to commence. This remains a priority project for the TCICA and we ask for an assurance that this funding will not be diverted elsewhere, so that the bridge can finally be built.

We also want your pledge of support for the third and final stage of the road, to commence immediately after the completion of stage 2, and a commitment to ensuring local people, local businesses and local councils continue to benefit from opportunities to participate in road construction projects. This will help to ensure continuity of employment and training opportunities and build on the momentum generated over the last five years.

Priority 4: Telecommunications and digital connectivity

Better telecommunications and digital connectivity to maximise economic, social, cultural, health and education benefits in our communities.

The TCICA calls for a commitment to improving regional telecommunications and digital connectivity to maximise economic, social, cultural, health and education benefits for our communities.

Poor telecommunications across the Torres Strait, Cape and Gulf region is a critical safety issue and will be more prominent as the Peninsula Development Road is sealed and usage significantly increases. According to data held by the Department of Communications and the Arts, there are more than 50 reported blackspot locations on the PDR alone, and more than 200 reported across the whole region.

The TCICA welcomes the Morrison Government's Budget announcement of $220 million for a large-scale multi-year Stronger Regional Digital Connectivity Package, which includes $160 million for two new funding rounds for the Mobile Blackspots Program. We also ask for commitments to:

- Continuing the Mobile Blackspots program in future budgets.
- A new Priority Locations Round to ensure areas with poor or no mobile coverage are addressed as a matter of priority.

While some communities in the Cape region are able to benefit from fibre optic networks connected directly to the National Broadband Network's (NBN) fibre backbone, other remote communities including islands in the Torres Strait and Gulf still have no access to the NBN. This is limiting the opportunities for people to access telehealth services, online education, social connections, and to participate in the digital economy.

NBN's Sky Muster services must be continually improved to overcome reliability and service issues, and new and innovative technologies that could offer superior connectivity for remote communities should be explored. We ask that priority is given to communities in the Torres Strait, Cape and Gulf region under the $60 million Regional Digital Connectivity Package to ensure these communities have equitable access to digital communications technology.

Priority 5: Addressing climate change

Deal with the impacts of climate change through mitigation works and a consistent national policy on addressing climate change.

Climate change is a major concern for TCICA members in coastal regions and particularly for low-lying islands in the Torres Strait, where sea levels are increasing at a rate of between six and eight millimetres a year. According to the Commonwealth-funded Reef and Rainforest Research Centre, sea levels in the Torres Strait are expected to rise by up to a metre by the year 2100, and up to 15 centimetres over the next two decades.

Many island communities are located just above the high tide line and often below annual inundation levels. Rising sea levels, frequent tidal inundations, storm surges, increased temperatures and changing rainfall patterns are having an immediate social, economic and environmental impact, and affecting the services delivered by local governments. People are being forced from their homes, community cemeteries are being inundated, roads are being washed into the sea and sea walls are failing.

The amount of viable land for housing, community infrastructure, small scale horticulture and traditional usage is decreasing, leading to a decline in the quality of life for many island residents.

Sea level rises, storm surges and changing weather patterns will continue to decrease the lifespan of essential infrastructure like waste treatment plants and threaten economic infrastructure like ports, airports, and roads.

An ongoing commitment to funding for coastal protection works in the Torres Strait and Gulf is needed in the short term to help mitigate impacts of tidal inundation.

With no funding specifically allocated to a Local Government Climate Change Fund in the Morrison Government's Budget, we want to see an election commitment from you for a long term strategy to help communities in the Torres Strait, Cape and Gulf manage and adapt to climate change, and a consistent national policy on climate change to give our communities confidence this critical issue is being appropriately addressed.

Priority 6: Natural disaster resilience

Increase the resilience of public infrastructure and assets to natural disaster events and ensure local governments are not worse off under new disaster relief and recovery arrangements.

The frequency of natural disaster events like floods and cyclones in the Torres Strait, Cape and Gulf region has a huge impact on public infrastructure and often means local councils are having to restore the same infrastructure year after year.

While we welcome the Morrison Government's $3.9 billion Emergency Response Fund, too much money is being spent by the State and Commonwealth Governments on returning infrastructure to its previous state, instead of rebuilding infrastructure to a better and more resilient standard. This cannot continue.

In its 2015 review of funding arrangements for natural disasters, the Productivity Commission recommended that the Australian Government cover half the additional costs of betterment to make assets more resilient.

We ask for a focus on making betterment funding for public infrastructure assets more accessible to increase resilience to natural disasters, while reducing future expenditure on asset restoration.

The TCICA also supports calls for the Australian Government to commit to meeting 75% of the costs of restoring government infrastructure to ensure local governments are not worse off under new disaster relief and recovery arrangements.

Priority 7: Lowering the cost of insurance

Lower the cost of insurance for Torres Strait, Cape and Gulf communities and make insurance more accessible to local governments, businesses and homeowners.

The failure of insurance markets in North Queensland is felt greatest in remote regions and island communities and is a major impediment to home ownership and business growth.

According to the First Interim Report of the ACCC's Northern Australia Insurance Inquiry, people living in the Torres Strait pay between three and ten times the average price for the southern part of Australia. This is simply unaffordable for many homeowners and for local people who are on the pathway to home ownership.

Insurance is also cost prohibitive for local government infrastructure in remote communities, including social housing assets. Some councils have little choice but to self-insure for some public assets, which places their annual budgets at risk.

Support for community level mitigation and for households to mitigate against the impacts of natural disaster events like floods, cyclones and tidal surges will help reduce the risks and drive down the cost of insurance. This is recognised throughout the ACCC's interim report and was also a recommendation of the report of the Northern Australia Insurance Premiums Taskforce.

The TCICA seeks an assurance that you will not lose focus on the importance of reducing insurance costs for local governments and people living and working in rural and remote parts of Far North Queensland. While we welcome the Morrison Government's commitment of $104.4 million to support states and territories in reducing disaster risks, more will be needed for public mitigation works to reduce potential natural disaster impacts, and for household level mitigation.

Priority 8: Tourism industry development

Grow a strong and sustainable tourism industry in the Torres Strait, Cape and Gulf region through business development, marketing and promotion for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Tourism is a growing industry in our region, with parts of Cape York alone attracting 60,000 visitors each year.   Given that 80% of visitors are self-drive, significant future growth in the sector is anticipated as the Peninsula Development Road and Gulf Savannah Way are progressively sealed. Without a coordinated approach to regional tourism development, marketing and promotion, communities will miss out on the opportunities to capture and leverage the benefits, including employment, skills development, capacity building and economic diversification.

The Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area are already benefitting from a $2 million tourism development and coordination project funded by the Torres Strait Regional Authority, however the Cape and Gulf region are without any dedicated resource to cater for increased tourism demand.

Dedicated funding for tourism development and coordination for the Cape and Gulf region is needed to develop solutions to grow and enhance the visitor economy and help develop the tourism skills of local Indigenous people so that they can take the region forward as a tourist destination.

The TCICA seeks a commitment for dedicated tourism coordination, marketing and development in the Cape and Gulf region to facilitate the transfer of expert tourism skills and knowledge to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people looking to establish or develop tourism businesses, and to grow the visitor economy in the region.

Priority 9: Northern Australia development

A renewed focus on growing Northern Australia, including addressing social disadvantage and allocating funding for programs and initiatives to build the capacity of Indigenous people in communities by supporting new business opportunities and the economic participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Many of the Northern Australia White Paper recommendations have been implemented however there has been little change on the ground to address economic and social disadvantage in remote and Indigenous communities in the Torres Strait and Cape region.

The TCICA asks for a refocussed commitment to Northern Australia, including reviewing and updating the Northern Australia White Paper so that it has a stronger focus on reducing the social disadvantages faced by remote communities due to the lack of community infrastructure, housing shortages, poor regional connectivity, limited business and employment opportunities, and poor access to quality health and education services.

Indigenous people living in the Torres Strait, Cape and Gulf region experience significantly lower life expectancy than the total Queensland population, and much high rates of preventable diseases like heart disease and diabetes. Over 67 percent of people are overweight or obese and nearly 30 percent of the population in the region engages in lifetime risky alcohol consumption. The leading cause of death for people aged between 15 and 44 is intentional self-harm.

A concerted effort must be made to addressing these issues to close the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Increasing liveability in communities by enabling better access to health, education and employment opportunities, improving community services and facilities, and through policies and programs aimed at recognising Indigenous interests and reconnecting people to land and culture, will help reduce social disadvantage and give young people a future they can look forward to.

The Ministerial Forum on Northern Development has to play a more significant role in driving outcomes for remote Indigenous communities, including through direct engagement with local governments. The current governance model for Northern Australia is not consultative and operates in isolation from major stakeholders in the region. Effort should be directed towards bringing local governments into the partnership so that they can provide advice directly to the Forum.

The Indigenous Reference Group (IRG) plays an important role in advising Northern Australian governments on opportunities for northern development. The TCICA supports in principle the recommendations of the IRG however we also welcome further opportunities to engage directly with the group as a whole to ensure North Queensland's Indigenous communities have a strong voice in the advice provided to government.

While there are many great ideas for innovative new businesses and industries, access to seed funding for business start-ups in remote areas is virtually non-existent and is stifling economic growth and job opportunities. With the costs of doing business in remote communities already high, measures that support the growth of new enterprises are also needed if there is to be any economic advancement.

Funding is needed to support:

- New business start-ups and for local delivery of business support services aimed at growing businesses in remote and Indigenous communities.
- Business cases for small-scale business opportunities to help evaluate innovative new ideas and attract commercial financing.

The TCICA wants to see ongoing investments in enabling essential infrastructure including roads, ports and airports, energy, water and digital communications, and services and support for local government and private sector projects. This includes commitments to:

- Facilitating cooperation between private sector investors and the Government on major projects in the Torres Strait, Cape and Gulf region.
- Providing seed funding as a motivator for industry cooperation and growth, for example for business cases and feasibility studies.
- Full government funding for public infrastructure projects like roads, energy networks, water storage, and telecommunications networks in our region.

We expect an incoming Government to prioritise northern Australia infrastructure to overcome service standard challenges, irrespective of the diseconomies resulting from the small scale of markets. The north will not grow in any meaningful way unless governments invest in nation building and transformative infrastructure now and recognise that the benefits will accrue long into the future.

Priority 10: Service delivery review

A review of Commonwealth service delivery in remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to find ways better meet community expectations and deliver good value for money.

Too many decisions about service delivery in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are being made in Canberra, with little regard to whether services are meeting community expectations or delivering good value for money.

Decision-making which is not aligned to what is happening on the ground and a lack of accountability by service providers for achieving outcomes is doing little to improve the lives of local people.

We ask for a commitment to a Productivity Commission review of the current Commonwealth Government service delivery system in remote communities to identify ways to deliver improved outcomes for communities in partnership with local government, reduce duplication of services, and drive better value for money for the Government.

Priority 11: Co-design of programs and policies

Genuine partnerships with local governments in the co-design of policies and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

As elected members, local councils are best placed to work with the Australian Government to represent the needs and interests of our people and help develop and deliver place-based responses and solutions to the challenges and opportunities in front of us.

We seek an assurance from you and your Party leaders that you will work with us to co-design policies and programs to improve health and education, provide real employment opportunities for local people, support businesses, and diversify the regional economy.

Demography and Society of the TCICA Region

44.5% of residents are aged 24 or under. This is significantly greater than Queensland at 32.9%. The median age is 28.1, compared to Queensland at 37.1. Nearly **65% of the population is working age** (15-64), which is on par with Queensland. 20% of people are on Newstart Allowance (5.9% for Queensland).

41% of people speak a language other than English at home, compared to 10% for the whole of Queensland.

8.7% of households are multiple family households (1.8% for Queensland). 74.4% of occupied private dwellings are rented (34.2% for Queensland). **Nearly 530 people per 10,000 persons are homeless**, compared to 45.6 per 10,000 persons for whole of Queensland.

Cook Shire, Torres Shire and Weipa have the highest number of people with a Bachelor degree or higher, reflecting the **significant public sector and mining industries**. 14.2% have engineering and related technologies qualifications and 10.8% have management and commerce qualifications. 8.3% have education qualifications.

Weipa has the highest median total family income, followed by Torres Shire and Cook Shire. Weipa's median family income at $144,404 per year. **37.4% of people in Weipa report a total family income of more than $156,000** per year. This is significantly higher than for Queensland as a whole (15.3%).

Across the region, the **median total personal income is $23,757** per year and the **median total family income is $58,928** per year. The region experiences an unemployment rate of over 25%. Yarrabah, Torres Strait Island Regional Council area, Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama have the highest unemployment rates – all above 40%.

Most communities are in the most disadvantaged quintile when measured against the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). Only people living in Weipa are in the least disadvantaged quintile.

The region experiences nearly **2.5 times the rate of reported offences** compared to Queensland as a whole.

Across the region there are 15 police stations, 17 ambulance stations, 2 fire stations, 46 schools and 37 hospitals.

The **burden of disease** for people living in the Torres Strait and Cape region **is significantly higher** than for the Queensland average. Rates of diabetes are 4 times higher, and incidences of coronary heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, are all two times higher. Gulf communities are likely to experience a similar burden of disease.

Source: Queensland Government Statisticians Office, Queensland Regional Profile for TCICA Region (custom region); TorresHealth

Our Members