

26 June 2023

Council supports 'Yes' vote for First Nations Voice to Parliament

At its Ordinary Meeting of Council on Wednesday 21 June 2023, Roper Gulf Regional Council made a resolution to support the 'Yes' vote in the National Referendum for the First Nations Voice to Parliament.

Recently, the Australian Government announced plans for a National Referendum to consider the need for an Indigenous Voice to the Federal Parliament.

Mayor Tony Jack welcomed the decision by the Council.

"This is a particularly important time for the Northern Territory, especially considering that approximately one third of the Territory's population are Indigenous Australians.

"Representation of this population is not proportional, particularly at a Federal Government level," Mayor Jack said.

Roper Gulf Regional Council and the communities it represents has had a long history with Indigenous rights and recognition.

The community of Barunga in particular is nationally significant where in 1988 at the Barunga Festival, senior Indigenous leaders presented Prime Minister Bob Hawke the Barunga Statement – a call for national Indigenous recognition and for a Treaty.

Barunga is located 80 kilometres south-east of Katherine on the Central Arnhem Road within the Roper Gulf Regional Council area.

The Barunga Statement now sits on the wall in Parliament House alongside the Yirrkala Bark Petition and the Sorry Coolamon (Apology to Indigenous Australians).

The Barunga Statement is part of the national story of Australian Indigenous rights and the past struggles experienced.

This year, a new statement has been developed and signed by representatives of the Northern, Central, Tiwi and Anindilyakwa land councils.

These representatives gathered on the traditional lands of the Bagala group at Barunga earlier this month and developed the 'Barunga Voice Declaration' – a statement that addresses all Australians and urges them to support the Voice to Parliament.

Mayor Tony Jack attended this meeting in Barunga and signed the declaration at the National General Assembly for the Australian Local Government Association in Canberra on Tuesday 13 June 2023.



Roper Gulf Regional Council Mayor Tony Jack signing the 'Barunga Voice Declaration' in Canberra.

Australia still does not have Treaty with its Indigenous people compared to other countries such as Canada and New Zealand, which have had successful Treaties in place for a long period of time.

Chief Executive Officer Marc Gardner said, "For a developed nation such as Australia to still be considering a Treaty demonstrates the massive gaps that are experienced by Indigenous Australians, and also for non-Indigenous Australians working in areas where the majority of the population is Indigenous people, such as the Northern Territory.

"These gaps are seen in a range of government funded programs such as the Community Development Program (employment program), which claims to be originally designed through consultation with Indigenous people however is now undergoing a major restructure.

"Representatives in our Council and communities had been vocal about changes required to the program for a long time, however these messages kept falling short on bureaucrat's ears.

"For these reasons, Roper Gulf Regional Council believes it is highly fundamental that direct representiveness to the Australian Parliament will result in more realistic policies and government programs that will benefit all Australians," said Mr Gardner.

The Council's support for the 'Yes' vote aligns with its recently adopted Reconciliation Action Plan.

The draft question that will be put to voters is whether to alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.

A date for the National Referendum is yet to be announced.

For more information on the Voice to Parliament, visit <https://voice.gov.au/>

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