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NPARC
NORTHERN PENINSULA AREA REGIONAL COUNCIL

Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council
PO Box 200, Bamaga, Qld 4876
Phone: 07 4090 4100 Fax: 07 4069 3264
ABN: 27 853 926 592

29 October 2026

Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601

SUBMISSION TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL AGREEMENT ON CLOSING THE GAP

Dear Productivity Commission,

The Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council **(Council)** acknowledges and thanks Commissioner Selwyn Button for meeting with Council's CEO, Mrs Dalassa Yorkston PSM, on Tuesday 20 October at the NIAA Office in Cairns. Council reiterates the matters drawn to Commissioner Button's attention at that time and confirmed at Council's Ordinary Council Meeting of 27 October 2026.

Governance of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, including Local Governance and the role local government plays in community-led initiatives

1. As noted by Council on 26 October 2026, the word "empowerment" is missing from the Closing the Gap Agreement. This empowerment extends to the governance of the Agreement, impacting the accuracy of statistical data used to report on progress on each of the Targets. Statistical data regarding each of the targets are inaccurate and reflect under-reporting because it does not involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils and organisations. We know from experience that Child Safety departments are reticent to provide statical data to even State Government statisticians regarding child removals and our experience of the data obtained in Queensland regarding life expectancy is at odds with the national reports. Empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, including local governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is in the governance of the Agreement is, in our view, critical. It must be acknowledged that this is a National Crisis that can only be resolved at the local community level by empowering Aboriginal and Torres strait Islander peoples, leaders, councils and communities.

2. **Shared decision-making in Agreement governance.**

   This does not occur – in real terms the Agreement is driven bureaucratically and from the Commonwealth in concert with the states, with no meaningful local involvement in the Agreements outcomes. Three ways to ensure this deficiency is remedied include:

a. Restoring the CDEP to its original state to be administered by the local Indigenous Councils and thus driving success towards the targets locally;

b. Abolishing the Racial Act against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Queensland by abolishing the Alcohol Management Plans (see UQ Report attached to this submission) thus reducing overrepresentation in the criminal justice system that does not beset non-indigenous Queenslanders who are not subjected to such racist prohibition schemes ; and

c. Listening. Listen and act on the voices of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – let them determine their own futures – the proposed structures put forward by Professors Marcia Langton and Tom Calma must be enlivened – Indigenous people representing their respective regions as a reference group to assist shape the final years of the current agreement is its only real chance of success.

3. Federal Government to establish TIED Funding to each of the 17 Closing the Gaps Targets – EXTREMELY IMPORTANT

Tied Commonwealth funding to each of the targets that are acted upon locally is, in our view, the only hope of reaching the targets by the Agreement's end date. Cost and funding transfers through the States, especially those that have demonstrated no appetite for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander empowerment reflected in their rejection of treaty, as occurred in Queensland, is a recipe for failure. We do not want to see the Agreement fail.

4. Masig Statement – Malangu Yangu Wakai – The Voice from the Deep

As the peoples of the Torres Strait and Cape York and signatories to the Masig Statement, we seek that the principles of the Masig Statement – The Voice from the Deep – Malangu Yangu Wakai is enshrined in the way forward for the Close the Gap Agreement deliverables.

The four aims outlined in the Masig Statement are to achieve self-determination for the people of the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula area; freely determine political status and pursue economic, social and cultural development; self-government in matters relating to internal and local affairs, and create partnerships with regional stakeholders, and the Queensland and federal governments to achieve the region's goals and aspirations.

Thus, Council sees that the Closing the Gap may be advanced through our active engagement in developing regional partnerships and in seeking partnerships with the Australian and Queensland Governments; but our aspirations and the Closing the Gap Agreement itself will never be realised, unless there is real and purposeful engagement by the Commonwealth Government (and the Queensland Government) in supporting the pursuit of our self-determination and regional sovereignty.

The Regional Organisation of Councils in the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area is a vital pathway in progressing the successful pursuit of the Targets. Driven locally, policy coherency must come from Canberra and George Street and delivered locally with council and community agency - empowerment.

In keeping with the Masig Statement, the Australian Government must collaborate with the governments of the region and the Queensland Government to establish governance arrangements necessary to our right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to our regional and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.

Should the Productivity Commission require any further information, you may contact Dalassa Yorkston PSM, CEO of NPARC

Yours sincerely,

Mayor Robert Poipoi
Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council

Incl: *The Masig Statement – Malangu Yangu Wakai - The Voice from the Deep*

AMP Review