



Speech by

**Hon. JUDY SPENCE**

**MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT**

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Hansard 16 October 2003

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**Aboriginal Councils**

**Hon. J. C. SPENCE** (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services and Minister for Seniors) (10.10 a.m.): Last week in this House I detailed the government's commitment to reforming the system of Aboriginal councils, making them much more transparent and accountable. I also gave a commitment to boost the support for councils to build their governance capacity. Today I am announcing the first step—an increase in funding to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities build effective and accountable councils. This financial year we are providing \$1.9 million under the financial accountability improvement program—up \$200,000 on last year. This program provides direct funding, services and training to 32 indigenous councils, not just those that will make the transition to the status of shire councils.

Training is a major focus of the funding boost. Nine professional training providers have been chosen to deliver an upgraded councillor training program. They are to be located throughout the state. An innovative leadership training stream has been added to the program, with units focusing on personal development and community accountability. Intensive training sessions will be offered to all Aboriginal and Island councillors in the lead-up to the March local government elections, with ongoing follow-up training available after the elections. The training program will cost \$248,000 this year, with councils also offered direct funding to purchase internal audit services, upgrade computers or purchase other equipment and services to improve their financial accountability. These initiatives are an important step in helping councils improve their governance arrangements.

Over the next four years DATSIP will introduce a wide range of measures to ensure councils in Aboriginal communities are equipped to meet the same standards as any other local government in Queensland. Those standards are expected by residents like Des Bowen, a former chairman of the Hope Vale Community Council. He issued a media release last week stating that Aboriginal people across Cape York Peninsula were disgusted with the behaviour of their councils and longed to make them accountable. The practical support from initiatives such as the financial accountability improvement program will give Aboriginal councils the tools they need to exercise effective and accountable community governance.

The future looks bright for many councils. We have announced proposed new laws. We are supporting councils with dedicated operational improvement strategies and we are now increasing funding and enhancing councillor training opportunities.