



Speech By
Hon. Craig Crawford

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Ministerial and Government Champions Program

 **Hon. CD CRAWFORD** (Barron River—ALP) (Minister for Seniors and Disability Services and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships) (10.09 am): I rise to speak about the Ministerial and Government Champions Program, first established in 2002, that operates across all Queensland discrete and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. After being cut by those opposite in 2012, the Palaszczuk government re-established the program in 2015, recognising the value it brings to participating communities.

During our last term of government, the program achieved a number of significant outcomes and also small but important wins such as flashing lights installed at school zones, improving street lights for safety, modifying an ex-Commonwealth Games minibus for disability access, partnering with Green Fleet to plant 2,000 fruit trees to support a community market garden, increasing telecommunications capability, bushfire safety equipment, cultural events and major construction projects.

The Palaszczuk government is committed to continuing this program as it connects ministers and Queensland government chief executives with community mayors and leaders to support more effective engagement with the Queensland government on the opportunities and challenges facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The program enables joint problem solving and co-design between communities and government, with priorities agreed by all stakeholders. We have recently confirmed the appointment of our new Ministerial and Government Champions. I thank the ministers for their input.

As the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, I have oversight of the program across all communities, supported by the Premier, as well as my assigned community of Doomadgee. I am pleased to report that some ministers have already visited their communities, to hear from the new mayors elected just last year and the community organisations about their priorities. For example, in March I accompanied the Attorney-General, Minister Fentiman, on her champions visit to the Torres Strait. The value the community places on the program and the strong relationship the community have developed with their champion was very obvious. I thank her for that.

I thank mayors Malone and Mosby of the Torres Shire Council and the Torres Strait Island Regional Council, Councillor Francis Pearson from Poruma, or Coconut Island, and Councillor Hilda Mosby from Masig, or Yorke Island, for their warm hospitality in hosting us on our visit. Minister Farmer, the Ministerial Champion for Aurukun, has also visited her community. During COVID, Minister Farmer was in regular contact to ensure that Aurukun had what they needed during the lockdown period. I look forward to visiting my community of Doomadgee in the very near future with my office working to confirm dates. I know that a number of other ministers are raring to go and preparing scheduled visits to their community.

Since the beginning of this year I have personally visited four communities. In February I visited Cherbourg. We heard from Uncle Eric about the hard times and the strong spirit of people who were sent to Cherbourg under previous government policies, as well as some entertaining anecdotes about key local characters. One anecdote I can remember is that there was a young lad who went to Cherbourg who apparently competed in a talent contest and beat someone called Barry Gibb at singing.

I also met with the Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council and heard their aspirations for their community. Last month, I visited Hope Vale and caught up with the Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council, the Hope Vale Congress of Clans, the Community Justice Group, the Alliance of Guugu Yimithirr People, and the Family Responsibility Commission. Spending time with Elder Willie Gordon on a shortened version of his cultural tour was humbling and inspiring. Mr Speaker, earlier this month I visited Yarrabah with you. We met the leaders of the Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council, the Yarrabah Leaders Forum, the Gurriny Yealamucka Health Services, the Yarrabah Community Justice Group and the Djungaal Elders Group.

The champions program is crucial to reframing the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the government. With the Palaszczuk government's focus on economic recovery, the champions program also provides key supports for communities to pursue their economic development aspirations. It provides a foundation for greater self-determination and empowerment for councils and communities and drives positive change that will contribute to closing the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.