



Speech By  
**Cynthia Lui**


**MEMBER FOR COOK**

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## ADJOURNMENT

### Torres Strait Island Council, 85th Anniversary

 **Ms LUI** (Cook—ALP) (7.21 pm): I rise to speak about the first Torres Strait Island Council conference, which was held on 23 August 1937 on Masig Island. On this day in 1937, representatives from 14 Torres Strait Island communities secured important concessions from the Queensland government in what was a pivotal point in time for Torres Strait Islanders transitioning from cultural law to Western law. Next week on 23 August I will join mayors and councillors from the Torres Strait Island Regional Council, Torres Shire Council, Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council, Torres Strait Regional Authority and communities across the Torres Strait to mark 85 years since the establishment of the first Torres Strait Island Council.

When we talk about the first councillors' conference, we are talking about a point in time when Torres Strait Islanders went through a major shift to their way of life under a very oppressive government regime. The pearling industry was booming, local men were employed on boats to dive for pearls to support their families on the islands, children attended school and were taught Western curriculum, local people turned to the only shop as a food source and for variety.

The minutes of the first conference clearly highlighted the oppressed nature Torres Strait Islanders adhered to. On the one hand, the councillors spoke at length about creating opportunities for locals in the pearling industry, discussed aspirations to purchase their own vessels for pearl diving and, at the same time, negotiated the crumbs they were getting paid. Even with the little money that they received, they still had to contribute towards the island fund tax, categorised into able-bodied men, partly disabled men, old men and women in work.

They discussed asking the managers of the local island stores to be fair and to reduce prices on expired goods sold so they could continue to buy food to feed their families. All of this was done under the watchful eye of the so-called 'Protector', who exercised intrusive authority over the lives of Torres Strait Islander people.

To the 14 councillors of 1937, I say thank you for your voice. Today, 85 years on, the Queensland government, under the leadership of the Hon. Annastacia Palaszczuk, signed a commitment for the Path to Treaty, a time for truth telling, healing and to reframe the relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in this state. I look forward to the journey ahead with all Queenslanders together. Eighty-five years on, I am proud to stand on the right side of history. We have come this far and we will go far.