




Speech By
Cynthia Lui

MEMBER FOR COOK

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PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENT

Cost of Living

 **Ms LUI** (Cook—ALP) (2.33 pm): Cost-of-living pressures are putting a lot of strain on individuals, families and households right across Queensland. When it comes to communities in my electorate, combined with the extra burden of remoteness and low socio-economic status, cost of living continues to widen the gap for social and economic prosperity in the region. While I acknowledge the pressures that cost of living has on households across Queensland, communities of the Northern Peninsula Area and the Torres Strait Islands are slapped with triple the cost and are paying a huge price for remote living.

The Torres Strait and the Northern Peninsula Area covers some of the most disadvantaged and complex communities in Cook, but even with that in mind, they are the most hardest hit communities when it comes to protecting their lifestyle. We know the impact that remoteness has on true economic growth and development. This leads to a lack of economic opportunities available for locals which underlies the high unemployment rate across the region. Just saying that, one can see that already communities are operating at an economic loss. Trying to protect your lifestyle is almost like waking up to fighting a losing battle every day. There is no denying that low to average income earners in the Torres Strait and NPA are doing it tough to keep up with everyday expenses.

For most communities there will only be one shop, one fuel bowser, one airline company and one freight company. I will say this, and I say this in the most respectful way: their prices are not doing my communities any favours. The monopoly, while great for providing essential services, does not provide any competition for options. Food prices are ridiculously high—still contributing to chronic diseases and other health problems; fuel prices are three times more than places like Cairns; the increase in freight costs restricts the option of freighting goods into communities; and airfares, even under the government's Local Fare Scheme, for some reason are still unaffordable, especially when compared to other travel costs in other areas around the state. There are many examples and there is not enough time today to discuss them all.

When our Premier made the important announcement to support a cost-of-living summit in the Torres Strait later this year, I, along with my communities, celebrated the announcement because we finally get to tackle a longstanding issue to influence positive change into the future. The Torres Strait and NPA cost-of-living summit is set for 7 December and I am given the wonderful opportunity to co-chair the summit with Minister Grace Grace. I am looking forward to having some robust discussions with government and key stakeholders around this important longstanding issue to unpack the challenges and come up with some tangible solutions. Change starts with good quality leadership. I want to acknowledge and thank our Premier and the Queensland government for supporting this very important initiative to influence positive change in the region.