



# ADVOCACY REPORT

Mayoral Delegation | Canberra

8-9 October 2025



FNO Regional Organisation of Councils

# FNQ at a glance

**\$19.84B**  
**GRP**  
(JUNE 2024)



INCREASE OF  
**2.9%**  
ON PREVIOUS YEAR

**26,654**  
LOCAL BUSINESSES

EXPORTS:



**\$3B**  
AGRICULTURE  
(2023/24)



**\$6.1B**  
TOURISM SALES  
(2023/24)



**\$674M**  
MINING



**\$1.9B**  
MANUFACTURING

**POPULATION**  
**294,194**



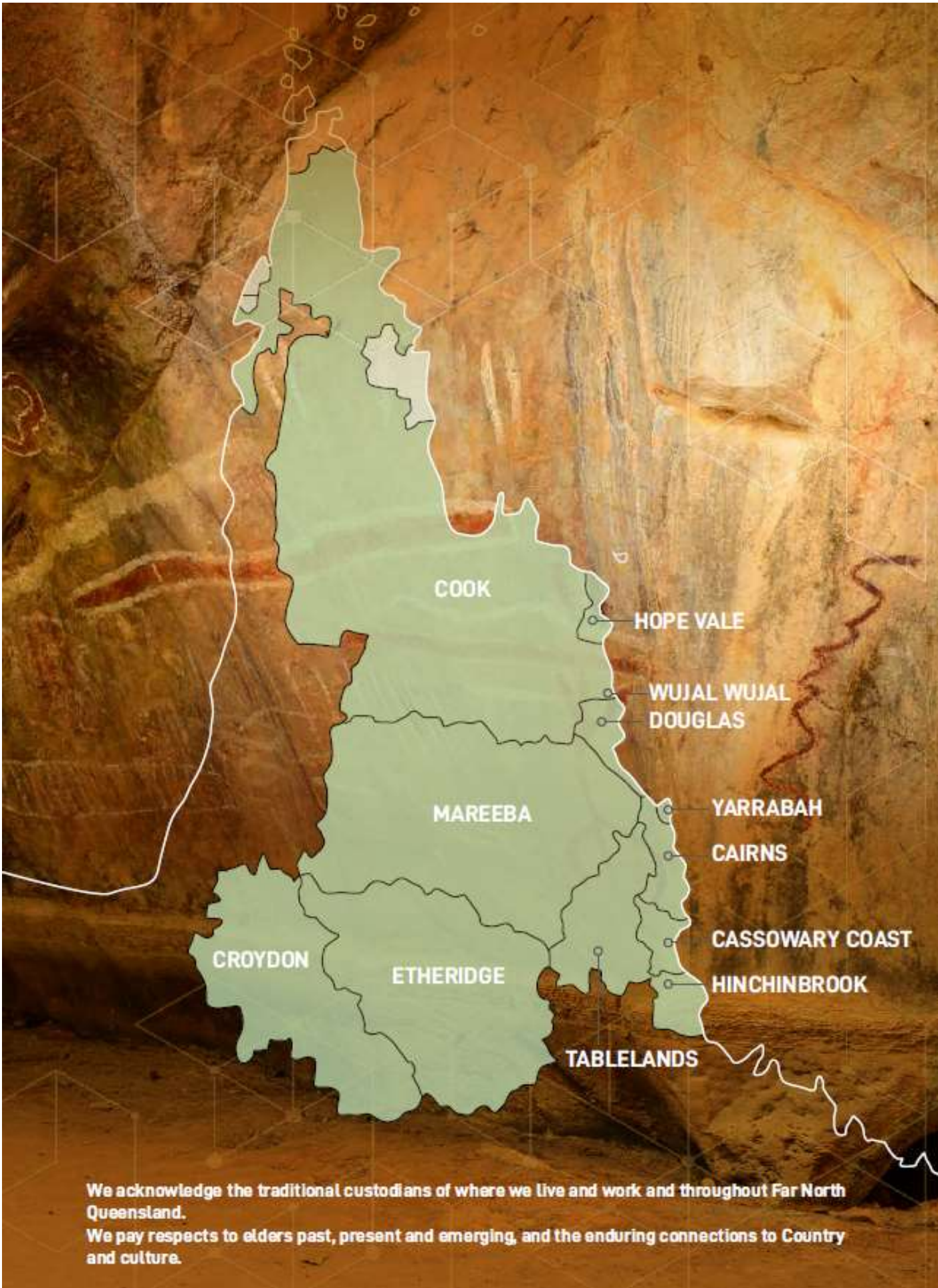
SEIFA INDEX OF  
DISADVANTAGE  
**510 to 981**  
(2021)

**41**

MEDIAN AGE

**11.2%**

FIRST NATIONS  
POPULATION



**We acknowledge the traditional custodians of where we live and work and throughout Far North Queensland.  
We pay respects to elders past, present and emerging, and the enduring connections to Country and culture.**

# FNQ REGIONAL PRIORITIES AT A GLANCE:



### FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE GRANTS

Restoring Financial Assistance Grants (FA Grants) to 1 percent is critical to ensuring councils can deliver the services and infrastructure communities rely on. These untied grants enable councils to maintain \$5.4 billion in road assets, \$2.5 billion in water assets, and thousands of hectares of green space across our region. Without restoration, councils face cuts, deferred maintenance, or passing costs to already stretched ratepayers. In the interim, we respectfully request an 80:20 federal-local funding split for small, medium, and remote councils.



### ROAD INVESTMENT

The Kuranda Range Road remains a priority, carrying over 11,000 vehicles daily despite not functioning as a reliable two-lane corridor since 2020. We thank the Federal Government for the \$210 million committed and seek clarity on long-term solutions to improve safety, heavy vehicle efficiency, and resilience.



### SAFE AND RESILIENT SUPPLY CHAINS

Recent disasters have highlighted vulnerabilities in northern freight routes. We call for a review of National Key Freight Routes and updated supply chain resilience planning to incorporate recent flood and cyclone impacts. Simple measures such as upgrading low-level crossings and expanding cold storage in Indigenous communities would protect food security and reduce isolation during disasters.



### NATIONAL LAND TRANSPORT NETWORK EXTENSION

We seek the extension of the National Land Transport Network from Smithfield to Mareeba and ultimately the Port of Weipa via the Peninsula Developmental Road. This would formally recognise the corridor's national significance for defence, trade, and remote community access, strengthening the case for future federal investment.



### FIRST AND LAST MILE - HEAVY VEHICLE PRODUCTIVITY ROUTES

A dedicated funding program is needed to address local road constraints that limit High Productivity Vehicle (HPV) access. In FNQ, 18 strategic local government roads could enable full HPV journeys.



### WATER

Local government-owned water and wastewater assets must be recognised as essential services under DRFA arrangements. Current exclusions force councils to fight for funding despite catastrophic damage, such as \$45 million in repairs in Douglas Shire following Cyclone Jasper. Amending DRFA definitions would ensure fair treatment of councils not operating as commercial business units.



### BULK WATER (AGRICULTURE)

Projects such as the Etheridge Agricultural Precinct and Lakeland Irrigation Scheme are progressing and promise expanded high-value cropping, beef production, and long-term regional prosperity.



### INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS - HOUSING AND STORYTELLING

Overcrowding and homelessness in communities such as Yarrabah, Wujal Wujal and Hope Vale are driving poor health, education, and employment outcomes. Strategic projects are ready, including Yarrabah's Balamba Neighbourhood and Early Learning Centre expansions. We call for urgent housing investment as the most fundamental step in closing the gap.



### CONCEPT - REGIONAL AND REMOTE - SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE

We propose a Special Economic Zone across inland and northern Australia to address structural disadvantage, attract population, and diversify regional economies. Incentives spanning taxation, housing, professional attraction, and industry development would support growth in renewables, critical minerals, agriculture, and Indigenous-led enterprises, while contributing to national resilience and reducing skills drain ahead of the 2032 Olympics.



### STORYTELLING

To highlight opportunities such as the Port of Mourilyan Master Plan, PALM Scheme, and post-disaster restoration progress.



## DELEGATION MEMBERS

- **Cr Rod Marti**  
Mayor, Tablelands Regional Council
- **Cr Lisa Scomazzon**  
Mayor, Douglas Shire Council
- **Cr Angela Toppin AM, FNQROC Chair**  
Mayor, Mareeba Shire Regional Council
- **Cr Bruce Gibson**  
Mayor, Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council
- **Cr Alister Gibson**  
Mayor, Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council



FNQ Regional Organisation of Councils

## Top 3 FEDERAL PRIORITIES

The top 3 Key priorities advocated at each meeting during this Mayoral Delegation included:

- Financial Assistance Grants (FAGs)
- Resilient Supply Chains, and
- Regional & Remote Special Economic Zone

Key Briefing Notes can be accessed via links below;

- [FNQROC Federal Pories \(October 2025\)](#)
- [Kuranda Range Road](#)
- [FNQROC Regional Roads Investment Strategy – Heavy Vehicle Productivity](#)
- [FNQROC Regional Roads Investment Strategy – Heavy Vehicle Freight Networks](#)
- [FNQROC Regional Roads Investment Strategy – Tourism Routes and estimated economic value](#)
- [Long Term Analysis of the role of Dams](#)



*Cr Marti, Cr Scomazzon, the Hon Kristy McBain MP, Cr Toppin, Cr Bruce Gibson, Cr Alistair Gibson*

**The Hon Kristy McBain MP, Minister or Emergency Management, Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and the Territories**

**• Top 3 Priorities and Discussions**

- Financial Assistance Grants
  - What increased FA Grants could do for Hope Vale
  - What increased FA Grants could do for Wujal Wujal
  - What increased FA Grants could do for Tablelands Regional Council
- Resilient Supply Chains
- Regional & Remote Special Economic Zone
- Water and Wastewater to be identified as essential services under DRFA – and DSC and MSC example
- Wujal Wujal Administration Building Funding Application

The Minister advised that Round 4 of the Disaster Ready Fund would fit increased cold storage requirements.



*Cr Alistair Gibson, Cr Bruce Gibson, Mr Peter Franks, Jamie Chaffey MP, Cr Marti, Cr Toppin, Cr Scomazzon*

**Mr Jamie Chaffey MP, Shadow Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Shadow Minister for Resources**

**• Top 3 Priorities and Discussions**

- Financial Assistance Grants
  - what it can do for our communities, and examples for TRC
  - What increased FA Grants would do for Hope Vale
- Resilient Supply Chains
- Regional & Remote Special Economic Zone
- PALM
- Douglas Future with Mill Closure
- FA Grants and
- Banana’s and impact of imports
- Wujal Wujal and infrastructure and jobs for the community

Mr Chaffey advised he and another member have established friends of LG and will send us details.

**ACTION:** Invite Mr Jamie Chaffey and Dr Anne Webster to FNQROC Board Meeting.



*Cr Marti, Cr Scomazzon, the Hon Madeleine King MP, Cr Toppin, Cr Alistair Gibson, Cr Bruce Gibson*

**Madeleine King - Minister for Resources, Minister for Northern Australia**

**Attendees:** Cr Marti, Cr Scomazzon, Cr Toppin, Cr Alistair Gibson, Cr Bruce Gibson, P Frank, D Irvine and, Rebecca Hamilton for the Minister’s office

**• Top 3 Priorities and Discussions**

- Financial Assistance Grants
- Resilient Supply Chains
- Regional & Remote Special Economic Zone
  - Hope Vale and incentives linked to SEZ, social economic issues, how increased FA grants would make a social difference, and how they can’t rate large mining.
  - Impact of increased FA Grants on TRC and the impact and cost of

infrastructure being impossible with rate base – just trying to do the basics.

- Time for economic zone has come. Struggle to get qualified people now and will be exacerbated with 2032
- DSC water and Wastewater – DRFA as a right not a fight

From the Minister:

- North Australia Joint Standing Committee – will be a parliamentary enquiry – yet to be announced, will ensure we are engaged.
- Northern Australia Action Plan – they are working through
- Re FA Grants – appreciate the challenges and will talk to Minister McBain about how to progress this through the Treasury.
  - SEZ – is interested, others have been working on this as well.



*The Hon Patrick Conroy MP*

*Minister for Defense Industry, Minister for Pacific Island Affairs*

**Advisors to the Minister – Nigel Bruce, Chief of Staff  
Amanda David, Senior Advisor**

**Attendees:** Cr Marti, Cr Scomazzon, Cr Toppin, Cr Alistair Gibson, Cr Bruce Gibson, P Franks, D Irvine

**• Top 3 Priorities and Discussions**

- Financial Assistance Grants
- Resilient Supply Chains
- Regional & Remote Special Economic Zone
- PALM Scheme in Mareeba Area
- Hope Vale:
  - What increased FA Grants would do for them

- Defence/border security – have noticed an increased amount of drugs through communities through Cape York
- TRC and DSC and the impact of increased FAGs
- Wujal Wujal and the impact of increased FAGs in the community
- There are a lot of Indigenous in defence/ex defence – they need medical support for PTSD and living in remote areas across Qld – if they get support they have to travel significant distances to get it.
- Would like to see some projects in communities built by defence
- Pacific Island Affairs and how our region fits?:
  - Flow of drugs
  - It's still evolving
  - In first year – trialling Pacific Engagement Visa – 3,000 per year on a ballot basis – likely to see many of these people in our region
- Port Douglas maintenance precinct to support business where they can't get work done in Cairns due to defence work.



*The Hon Richard Marles MP*

*Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defense*

**Advisors to the Minister –  
James McDonald - Advisor  
Kim Duong – Advisor**

**Attendees:** Cr Marti, Cr Scomazzon, Cr Toppin, Cr Alistair Gibson, Cr Bruce Gibson, P Franks, D Irvine

- **Top 3 Priorities and Discussions**

- Financial Assistance Grants
- Resilient Supply Chains
- Regional & Remote Special Economic Zone
- Water and Waste as an essential service under DRFA – DSC and MSC examples
- FA Grants and the impact an increase would make to Wujal Wujal, Tablands and Hope Vale
- Discussion re competitive funding and resources of small councils

The office shared with us:

- Important to strengthen Northern Bases
- Northern Australia is a key priority



*Cr Scomazzon, the Hon David Littleproud MP, Cr Toppin, Cr Alistair Gibson, Cr Bruce Gibson*

**The Hon David Littleproud MP – Shadow Minister for Agriculture**

**Attendees:** Cr Scomazzon, Cr Toppin, Cr Alistair Gibson, Cr Bruce Gibson, P Franks, D Irvine

- **Top 3 Priorities and Discussions**

- Financial Assistance Grants
- Resilient Supply Chains
- Regional & Remote Special Economic Zone



Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy

**Kayannie Denigan - Senior Advisor to Senator McCarthy**

**Attendees:** Cr Bruce Gibson, Cr Alistair Gibson, D Irvine

• **Top 3 Priorities and Discussions**

- Financial Assistance Grants
- Resilient Supply Chains
- Regional & Remote Special Economic Zone
- Hope Vale:
  - no rates base, importance of FA Grants, as an example, they support Day Care and Child Care, etc, FA Grants contribute to this
  - RES program – waiting on the outcome – Wujal Wujal and Hope Vale want to be part of the economic programs coming out
  - Need to take control of the ships coming past – tied of the multi nationals coming through with programs funded by Fed/State – needs to be home grown and funds remain circulating within communities
  - Have formed cooperative to employ local people
- Wujal Wujal – we are a community who want to achieve and arise. Want to be part of our destiny.

From the Department:

- Remote Jobs and Economic Program (RJEP) – 3,000 jobs commitment. – Does this include Yarrabah? – Department to get back to us.
- Food Security – they are subsidising the cost of 30 items



Cr Scomazzon, Cr Bruce Gibson, Senator Matt O'Sullivan, Cr Toppin

**Senator Matt O'Sullivan - Shadow Assistant Minister for Fisheries and Forestry, and Shadow Assistant Minister for Infrastructure**

**Attendees:** Cr Scomazzon, Cr Toppin, Cr Bruce Gibson, D Irvine

• **Top 3 Priorities and Discussions**

- Financial Assistance Grants
- Resilient Supply Chains
- Regional & Remote Special Economic Zone
- DSC, increased FA Grants important for council's services and managing cost shifting
- Water and Waste Water to be identified as essential services under DRFA
- Need to look after the regions
- Hope Vale – not rate based, rely heavily on FA Grants, Have child care, Kindy and Aged Care they provide. Without it they wouldn't exist. They depend heavily on grants and they have to be creative to raise revenue.

From the Office:

- Looking at safety on Local Roads – trying to make this a national initiative, want to create fund for road safety. Remote regional roads need attention.
- Very interested in infrastructure for growth.



*Cr Scomazzon, Cr Alistair Gibson, Cr Rod Marti, Dr Anne Webster, Cr Toppin, Cr Bruce Gibson*

**Dr Anne Webster - Shadow Minister for Regional Development, Local Government & Territories, and Shadow Minister for Regional Communications**

**Attendees:** Cr Scomazzon, Cr Alistair Gibson, Dr Anne Webster, Cr Toppin, Cr Bruce Gibson, P Franks, D Irvine

**• Top 3 Priorities and Discussions**

- Financial Assistance Grants
- Resilient Supply Chains
- Regional & Remote Special Economic Zone
- Small regional councils finding it extremely difficult.
- Example of impact on DSC and DRFA for water and wastewater
- All levels of government need to step up for local government
- Hope Vale – not rate based, rely heavily on FA Grants, cannot charge mining company rates.

- Wujal Wujal – to build better community and increase in FA Grants will help immensely. WW want to build back better after Jasper.
- TRC – Impact of increase FA Grants, Just can't keep charging more rates. Increase in FA Grants is not to do flash stuff it is just to do the bare minimum.
- SEZ, important to incentivise – 2032 will drain our people. Only a small group of people would be affected and don't believe it will be a big impact on budget.

From Dr Webster:

- Unfortunate LRCI is being cut
- Is looking at the formula State Government uses to distribute FA Grants



*Cr Rod Marti, Cr Bruce Gibson, the Hon Melissa Price MP, Cr Toppin, Cr Alistair Gibson, Cr Scomazzon*

**The Hon Melissa Price MP - Shadow Minister for Defence Industry, Shadow Minister for Defence Personnel**

**Attendees:** Cr Scomazzon, Cr Alistair Gibson, Dr Anne Webster, Cr Toppin, Cr Bruce Gibson, P Franks, D Irvine, Senior Advisor to the Minister.

**• Top 3 Priorities and Discussions**

- Financial Assistance Grants
- Resilient Supply Chains

- Regional & Remote Special Economic Zone
- Focus on SEZ
- LRCI



*Cr Toppin, Cr Scomazzon, Jason Wood, P Franks, Cr Marti, Cr Alistair Gibson, Cr Bruce Gibson, D Irvine*

**The Hon Jason Wood - Shadow Minister for International Development and Pacific Island Affairs**

**Attendees:** Cr Scomazzon, Cr Alistair Gibson, Cr Toppin, Cr Bruce Gibson, P Franks, D Irvine, Cath - Advisor to the Minister.

**• Top 3 Priorities and Discussions**

- Financial Assistance Grants
- Resilient Supply Chains
- Regional & Remote Special Economic Zone
- PALM, highly dependant on PALM, 90% great, 10% disengaged
- Jurisdiction is unclear re those that have breached VISA requirements.
- Wujal Wujal and Hope Vale, story re entrepreneurial with how they raise revenue
- Hope Vale – have seen increase in drugs coming through from Pacific Island corridor.

- High indigenous participation in defence, many in communities are ex defence, they could be used for border force.

**ACTION:** Hope Vale to ask Matt Smith to write to border force re issues and opportunities.



*Cr Alistair Gibson, Senator Liddle, Cr Bruce Gibson*

**Senator Kerryne Liddle - Shadow Minister for Social Services, Shadow Minister for Indigenous Australians**

**Attendees:** Cr Alistair Gibson, Cr Bruce Gibson, D Irvine

**• Top 3 Priorities and Discussions**

- Financial Assistance Grants
- Resilient Supply Chains
- Regional & Remote Special Economic Zone
- Banana farms and potential impact of imports on our region
- Workforce development – build all our own homes
- RES, Hope Vale and Wujal Wujal with other indigenous organisations have tendered to deliver – still waiting.
- Defence – large number of indigenous ex defence, would be good to use as border force, would help to prevent drugs in communities.
- Discussion re disengaged children

- FRC is a toothless tiger
- Have requested Direct Instruction to be removed from Hope Vale School
- Qbuild has put stop to maintenance on Community Housing (Darlene chase this up)

**ACTION:** Cr's Gibson's contact information to the Senator.



*Cr Scomazzon, Cr Marti, the Hon Josh Wilson MP, Cr Toppin, P Franks*

**The Hon Josh Wilson MP - Assistant Minister for Climate Change and Energy, Assistant Minister for Emergency Management**

**Attendees:** Cr Scomazzon, Cr Marti, Cr Toppin, P Franks

- ***Top 3 Priorities and Discussions***
- Financial Assistance Grants
- Resilient Supply Chains
- Regional & Remote Special Economic Zone
- DFRA for Water and Waste Water – should be Cat A for LG Owned Assets
- Betterment Funding and funding for more resilient infrastructure