



BANDARRAN MARRA'GU GATHERING STRENGTH STATEMENT

20 May 2025

This week, more than one hundred Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from across Queensland came together in Magan-djin for the Bandarran Marra'gu Gathering Strength Summit.

Guided by the lived experience of Senior Elders and all generations following, we drew on our collective strength, determination and knowledge to inform a First Peoples agenda promoting better futures for our families and communities – in particular, our children and young people.

Our Children and Young People's rights are not negotiable. Culture is not optional. Justice is a responsibility.

At the centre of our discussions was the ongoing violation of human and cultural rights of our people and in particular, the targeted harm perpetuated against our children and young people by this Government.

Our children come from many different Peoples and are all Queenslanders. They are not safe, and they cannot wait any longer.

Queensland is a human rights jurisdiction. This must mean something for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

We argue that what is happening in Queensland are egregious breaches of human rights against children, reminiscent of past Queensland Government policies and practices separating children and families. We fear that acts are being committed by the State with the intent to destroy our First Nations by forcibly transferring our children from our responsibility, out of our care, and out of our communities.



We see the overrepresentation of our children in Queensland's child protection and youth justice systems not as a coincidence, but as a direct consequence of policies that fail to respect our rights, of services that are culturally unsafe, and of decisions made without our leadership or agreement.

We demand compliance with Australia's international human rights obligations, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Queensland Human Rights Act.

We demand that the Terms of Reference for the Queensland Commission of Inquiry into the Child Safety System be reviewed to acknowledge and address the systemic harm against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. We further call on the current government to meet with representatives of our communities to determine the pathway forward and the actions that we deem are in the best interests of our children.

We hold solutions. It is fundamental that there is adequate opportunity for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to participate directly through the entire duration of the inquiry.

The inquiry must recognise and address the clear and distinct intersectionality between the child protection and youth justice system. They are two segments of a pipeline which create a trajectory into ongoing imprisonment, poverty and disadvantage. The pipeline of the removal and incarceration of our children exists because of the systemic failure of housing, education and health, as identified in a number of reports including by the Queensland Productivity Commission's 2019 Report into Imprisonment and Recidivism.



The Queensland Government's ongoing wilful and wanton disregard of the decades of evidence, countless reports and our ongoing calls to take responsibility for our children have resulted in the current crisis that all Queenslanders are facing.

We do not need another inquiry that speaks around us. We need action that starts with us.

We call for the Terms of Reference of the Child Protection Commission of Inquiry to be explicitly inclusive of the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The terms need to ensure that the systemic harm experienced by our children is investigated to the fullest possible capacity to ensure that real change occurs.

There is precedent set in Queensland under the Meriba Omasker Kaziw Kazipa (Torres Strait Islander Traditional Child Rearing Practice) Act 2020 that cultural lore and responsibility to our children sits with our people, and can be embedded within state legislation (law).

Our People and our rights are under attack. The treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in this state, is an "affront to dignity and justice". We have lost all faith in the capacity of the Queensland Government to ensure our interests are represented.

The prospect of resetting the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the Queensland Government is now significantly diminished and continues to be undermined under the current leadership.



There is no substitute for truth, respect and shared power. Anything less reinforces the same systems that have failed our children for generations.

Human rights are universal, inalienable, and indivisible. Governments have a moral and legal obligation to ensure they are realised.

On 21 April 2025, United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, affirmed that “the individual and collective rights of Indigenous Peoples are non-negotiable”. He emphasised that in recognising and acting upon the leadership, rights, and needs of Indigenous Peoples, “Governments must honour their obligations in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – without delay”.

As rights holders, we are determined to achieve truth, justice and healing for our people and our future generations. We will use all tools at our disposal to ensure our rights are recognised, realised, and respected.

We call on all agencies across Queensland to respect the human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Queensland. Above all, respect our children and their futures.

We speak with the authority of our lived experience, our cultural knowledge and commitment to our children and next generations. When we talk about making communities safer, it must start by listening to those who have carried that responsibility for generations. Similarly, if the Queensland Government is serious about keeping our communities safe, they will stop punishing symptoms and start partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, teachers, community leaders, and community-controlled services.

We are not asking — these are our rights. We are entitled to be safe, heard, and grounded in who we are.