



# Torres Shire Council

*To Lead, provide and facilitate a sustainable,  
safe and culturally vibrant community*

## MEDIA RELEASE

26 JANUARY 2026

### **Torres Shire Council Celebrates Community Spirit at Australia Day Event**

Torres Shire Council hosted a full day of celebrations at the TI SportsPlex on Monday, bringing communities together to mark Australia Day with recognition, reflection and plenty of family fun.

To ensure everyone could take part, ferries and land transport were chartered for residents of Ngurupai and Muralag, and entry fees to the TI Sports Complex were waived for the day.

The program began with a moving Australian Citizenship Ceremony. Following the candidates' pledges, Mayor Elsie Seriat OAM proudly presented citizenship certificates to the Shire's three newest Australian citizens, warmly welcoming them into the Australian community.

Mayor Seriat then officially opened the Australia Day Ambassador and Awards program. In light of this year's theme, Reflect. Respect. Celebrate., the mayor reflected on our shared history, the oldest continuous culture on Earth, and the journey that has shaped our nation. The mayor acknowledged the challenges, truths, and the voices that must continue to be heard.

She spoke of respecting the diverse peoples who make up our community—First Nations families, long-time locals, and those who have chosen Australia as their new home saying that each person brings a story, a strength, and a contribution that enriches our region.

And how today, we also celebrate—not by ignoring the complexities of the date, but by honouring the spirit of community, unity, and the everyday acts of kindness and leadership that make our home such a special place.

Mayor Seriat mentioned that “even though we are here celebrating Australia Day, we are mindful of all the illegal vessels currently in our waters and we don't want to be a forgotten part of Australia.”

Following her address, she welcomed this year's Australia Day Ambassador, Olympian Gerrard Gossens OAM. Mayor Seriat thanked Mr Gossens for coming to speak and said, “your presence reminds us of the strength, resilience, and achievement that exists within our communities, both here in the Torres Strait and across Australia.”

Mr Gossens quickly won over the crowd with his humour and easy-going style. Through personal stories and reflections, he encouraged the audience to embrace challenges and pursue their dreams, regardless of limitations.

His uplifting address set the tone perfectly for the Australia Day Awards, which celebrated the outstanding contributions of local individuals and groups.

Mayor Seriat was then joined by Deputy Mayor Cr Natasa Nakata, Cr Fujii and Mr Gossens for the award presentations.

Two **Appreciation Awards** were presented.

**Cathy Parker** was recognised for her exceptional dedication and service to the Horn Island community. As the island's nurse, Cathy consistently goes above and beyond — providing quality healthcare, emotional support and guidance to people of all ages. In a remote island setting, she is often the first point of contact for community wellbeing and is widely known for her compassion, reliability and genuine care. Her commitment has built deep trust within the community and made a significant positive impact on the health and confidence of Horn Island residents.

**Mr Shotaro Dorante and family** were honoured for their courage and calm leadership during an emergency on Thursday Island. When a young person was injured in a shark encounter on 11 October 2025, the Dorante family acted immediately — helping bring the young person safely from the water, supporting those around them, and providing practical and emotional care with dignity and cultural respect. They did all of this while also ensuring the safety of their own family member with a disability. Their quick actions and compassion had a life-changing impact, and thanks in part to their response, the young boy is now recovering well in Townsville Hospital.

The **Participation Award** went to **Miss Anne Rita Gela**, an inspiring 11-year-old volunteer with the Thursday Island Animal Support Group. Despite her young age, Anne Rita has already dedicated four years of consistent service to supporting animal health and wellbeing in the community. Starting at just seven years old, she has steadily taken on more responsibility, assisting at clinics and beginning to learn about microchipping pets. Her enthusiasm, maturity and genuine care make her an outstanding young role model, with dreams of becoming a vet or vet nurse.

**TSC Manager Community Services, Tanya Loban**, accepted the **Community Event of the Year Award** for the **2025 Winds of Zenadth Kes Cultural Festival**. Under the theme "*Connecting Past, Present and Future*", the festival brought together Elders, families, young people, visitors and cultural groups from across Zenadth Kes to celebrate Torres Strait Islander identity, traditions and stories. Through dance, music, language, art and cultural demonstrations, the festival created a vibrant space for intergenerational learning, cultural pride and economic opportunity, honouring ancestral knowledge while empowering the next generation.

The **Achievement Award** was presented to **Mr Ashwyn Seden**, an inspiring young Torres Strait Islander man whose dedication to education, career development and community service is truly outstanding. At just 19, Ashwyn has already completed multiple health qualifications and begun a Diploma of Nursing at Thursday Island TAFE, with plans to progress to a Bachelor of Nursing. Alongside his studies, he has gained hands-on experience through a traineeship and casual work at Thursday Island Hospital. His drive, maturity and commitment make him a powerful role model for young people across the Torres Strait.

The **Cultural Recognition Award** recipient was **Miss Elsa Day of Mer Island**, a respected Elder of the Komet Tribe of the Meriam Nation. For nearly two decades, Miss Day has dedicated herself to education and to revitalising and strengthening the Meriam Mir language. She has spent countless hours teaching language to all ages, developing cultural learning resources, and guiding the community in correct use and pronunciation. Her work has strengthened cultural pride and identity, helping ensure Meriam Mir remains a living language for future generations.

**Mr Tyrell Viti** of Thursday Island was named **Young Citizen of the Year**. A recent Year 12 graduate of Tagai State College, Tyrell has already made a strong impact through his leadership, community involvement and positive influence. He has participated in leadership and university programs and served as co-MC at major events including the Winds of Zenadth Kes Cultural Festival and the Community Christmas Extravaganza. In 2026, Tyrell will begin university studies as he works toward long-term goals that will allow him to continue giving back to his community.

The **Citizen of the Year Award** was presented to **Mrs Mary Mills Williams** of Thursday Island. Mary is widely respected for her leadership, dedication and long-standing volunteer service. Through her work with local non-government organisations, she has strengthened governance, supported community development and advocated for positive change. Known as someone who always shows up, Mary is a reliable and proactive presence at community events and a strong advocate for inclusiveness and participation. Her lasting impact on the Torres Shire community is both meaningful and deeply valued.

Following the award presentations, Council opened the pool facilities and hosted a BBQ for a relaxed afternoon with community. Lifeguards debuted their new uniforms, and the weather remained clear for families and friends to come together and enjoy the day.

The event was a true reflection of the Torres Shire spirit — resilient, proud, and deeply connected to community.

Approved by  
Mary Bani  
Chief Executive Officer