

First Nations Self-Determination, Representation & Wellbeing Forum

Event Summary

A local government initiative and an Australian first, the inaugural First Nations Self-Determination, Representation & Wellbeing Forum was held on Kabi Kabi Country, 22 March 2021. Sunshine Coast Council's aim was to support and encourage First Nations education, leadership, empowerment, and networking. The Forum established a platform for the First Nations community to come together, nurture relationships and inspire action.

Hosted at the Sunshine Coast Convention Centre at Novotel Twin Waters the First Nations Forum brought together over 260, predominately First Nations, attendees and featured First Nations specialists, academics and experts presenting knowledge from their respective fields.

The Local Government Act (2009) requires council to uphold the principle of "democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement", which aligns with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' (2007) principals of free, prior, and informed consent, supporting First Nations self-determination. Council's strategies, including: the [Corporate Plan](#); [Community Strategy](#); and [Reconciliation Action Plan](#), support this self-determining approach, while the Forum provides a platform for First Nations voices to be heard on matters relating to their representation, access, and entitlements.

The Forum was delivered in partnership with Sunshine Coast Council, PHN, the Healing Foundation, University of the Sunshine Coast, Refocus and TribalLink. The vision of First Nations Forum was to elevate First Nations community voices leading community engagement, to foster intrinsic and benevolent relationships, as a foundation to grow strong, sustainable, and empowering outcomes.

Opening with an outdoor Welcome to Country and cultural performances, attendees were led inside the convention centre by Gubbi Gubbi Dance. Once inside, the audience was introduced to the Forum with a presentation on the history of First Nations activism, highlighting the importance of self-determination, representation, and wellbeing for First Nations peoples.

The Forum used a strengths-based approach to discuss significant topics for the First Nations community including human rights, justice, representation, truth-telling, cultural healing, knowledge and allyship. In-depth discussions included the themes of First Nations governance, dispute resolution and a First Nations Voice. The day program highlighted case studies of Jagalingou Wangan, Butchulla Men's Business, and the Statement from the Heart Working Group.

Woven into the program were cultural grounding sessions and breakout discussion groups which allowed participants to deeply connect with, and give their voice to, the themes of the day. Sharing stories, knowledge, food and music performances from First Nations artists deepened the connections of participants, with the forum concluding with a dinner, panel discussion and keynote speeches from Sunshine Coast Council, Healing Foundation and PHN.

The First Nations Self-Determination, Representation & Wellbeing Forum is an important platform for First Nations people to come together, nurture relationships, and inspire action.

