

Business Paper

LATE REPORTS ORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING

**ALBY SCHULTZ MEETING CENTRE,
COOTAMUNDRA**

6:00PM, Tuesday 22nd August, 2023

Administration Centres: 1300 459 689

LATE REPORTS

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6 MAYORAL MINUTES

6.2 MAYORAL MINUTE - NEIL PARA, WALK FOR FREEDOM

DOCUMENT NUMBER	397288
AUTHORISING OFFICER	Charlie Sheahan, Mayor
REPORTING OFFICER	Charlie Sheahan, Mayor
ATTACHMENTS	1. Neil Para Media Release ↓

RECOMMENDATION

The information in the Mayoral Minute be received and noted.

Introduction

On 1 August, Sri Lankan refugee Neil Para set out on a 1000 kilometre walk for freedom to raise awareness of the plight of refugees in Australia. Neil will be arriving in Cootamundra on 24th August 2023.

A media release is attached with more information.

Discussion

As a Refugee Welcome Zone, Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council is fully supporting Mr Para's walk for freedom initiative. Cr Leigh Bowden (Deputy Mayor) and I, Cr Charlie Sheahan (Mayor) will be meeting with Neil on Thursday 24th August at Albert Park, between 2pm and 4pm (time to be confirmed).

I encourage anyone who can, to come and support Neil on his journey.

With support from regional refugee advocacy groups such as Rural Australians for Refugees, Neil plans to deliver a petition to Mr Albanese's office. The petition has already attracted nearly 15,000 signatures. Petition link: <https://www.change.org/p/neil-is-a-refugee-in-australia-he-is-walking-1000-km-to-ask-albomp-for-a-fair-go>

Subject: FW: Summary of Neil Para's Walk

From: Jane Salmon <janesalmonupstream@me.com>

Sent: Friday, 28 July 2023 3:37 PM

To: Mail <Mail@cgrc.nsw.gov.au>

Subject: Summary of Neil Para's Walk

Media release for Councillors

Refugee's 1000km walk highlights plight of thousands

Ballarat, July 2023: On 1 August, Sri Lankan refugee Neil Para will set out on a 1000 kilometre walk for freedom to raise awareness of the plight of refugees in Australia.

Neil, who will walk from Ballarat to the Prime Minister's Sydney electorate office, has lived in Australia for 11 years with his wife Sugaa and their three young daughters Nivash, Kartie and Australian-born Nive.

With support from regional refugee advocacy groups such as Rural Australians for Refugees, Neil plans to deliver [a change.org petition](#) to Mr Albanese's office. The petition has already attracted nearly 15,000 on signatures.

The Federal Government's Resolution of Status (RoS) Visa announcement in February paved the way for permanent visas for 19,000 refugees living with temporary visas.

Neil is one of thousands of other people who came seeking safety over a decade ago, who human rights organisations say were denied a fair process under the former government's so-called "fast track" refugee process.

Beyond trying to find certainty for his family, for whom return to strife torn Sri Lanka would be dangerous, Neil is advocating for others left in similar uncertain circumstances.

"I'm calling on the government to end the uncertainty for all refugees seeking a safe home. Please grant us permanent visas and the right to work," Neil said. "I am also walking so that refugee children can have certainty."

Neil and Sugaa are ambitious to build careers, but like many people seeking asylum, they have been denied the right to work. Neil was a hairdresser in Sri Lanka and wants to be a police officer in Australia, while Sugaa would love to be an aged care worker.

Neil is a tireless volunteer for the State Emergency Service, while Sugaa has volunteered for years in aged care and at the visitor information centre. Neil [received an award as one of Australia's Best Neighbours](#) in 2020.

Neil will leave from the office of Ballarat MP Catherine King Ballarat at 8am on 1 August and trek to Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's electorate office in Marrickville, Sydney, arriving in September.

For photos and interviews before, during and after the trek, call Neil on 0452 533 759.

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