

-For Immediate Release-

29 August 2023:

COOTAMUNDRA WELCOME RESPITE FOR REFUGEE WALK

Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council (CGRC) played host to Neil Para a Sri Lankan refugee who set out on a 1000km walk from his hometown of Ballarat in Victoria to the electorate office of Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in Marrickville Sydney.

Mr Para will deliver a petition to the Prime Minister calling on the government to end the uncertainty for all waiting refugees. Many who have been living in limbo for more than 10 years. The petition can be found at

[Petition · I'm a refugee in Australia. I'm walking 1000km to ask the PM for a fair go · Change.org](#)

Mr Para met with CGRC mayor Cr Charlie Sheahan, deputy mayor Cr Leigh Bowden and Cr Trevor Glover on Thursday 24 August in Cootamundra's Livvi's Place at Albert Park.

Mr Para said his walk so far has not been too hard and not too easy, he welcomed the number of motorists who greeted him as he made his way along the Olympic Highway from Junee to Cootamundra, and the commented on the picturesque countryside with the canola flowering.

"I've had many motorists stopping for a 'selfie' and talking with me about my journey," he said.

As of Thursday, Mr Para's petition had reached over 17,000 signatures and he hoped there would be more to come as he makes his way towards Sydney. His journey has covered approximately 640 klm with a further 370 klm to go.

"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, I am also walking so that refugee children can have certainty," Mr Para said.

Councillors Sheahan, Bowden and Glover welcomed Mr Para to town, and hosted a dinner in his honour on Thursday evening.

CGRC mayor Councillor Charlie Sheahan acknowledged Mr Para's pledge.

"This is a situation that needs rectifying, Mr Para is a valuable member of his community, he does a lot of community work, his wife would like to work in aged care, and they have three girls. Mr Para wants to work and aspires to join the police force. Living in limbo, not being able work, or build on their aspirations in the lucky country must be disappointing and demeaning," Cr Sheahan said.

Mr Para was accompanied by support person Stockinbingal resident Jeff Passlow, who is a member of Aware Cootamundra. Mr Passlow was approached by the Yass branch of Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR) to act as a support and host person whilst Mr Para was in the district. RAR has organised a team of support people along the route to accommodate Mr Para on his walk.

Mr Para thanked the Councillors for their hospitality and hoped that many in the region would now be more aware of the plight of refugees in this country.

Picture and caption:

Mr Neil Para stopped off at Cootamundra on his 1000 kilometre walk from Ballarat to Sydney, to deliver a petition and a passionate plea to Prime Minister Anthony Albanese about the plight of refugees in Australia. Pictured left to right GCRC deputy mayor Councillor Leigh Bowden, Mr Para, CGRC mayor Councillor Charlie Sheahan and Councillor Trevor Glover in Livvi's Place at Albert Park on Thursday.



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Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council
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