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## **MEDIA RELEASE | Mayor Gela Lobbies Canberra**

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Mayor Gela will be in Canberra during budget week to make submissions to Ministers and other parliamentarians on key issues affecting the Torres Strait region.

The Mayor is meeting with over 20 politicians including; Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator Nigel Scullion and Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, the Hon Peter Dutton.

Other parliamentarians include Senator Patrick Dodson, Senator Pauline Hanson, Senator Malarndirri McCarthy, Senator Richard Di Natale, the Hon Linda Burney, the Hon Tony Burke, the Hon Doug Cameron and the Hon Mark Butler.

These are just a handful of politicians Mayor Gela will be meeting to discuss key issues, including:

### **Remote Indigenous Housing**

To alleviate overcrowding in the region Mayor Gela is lobbying to extend the National Partnership Agreement for Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH) for an additional 10 years.

The Agreement finishes in June 2018, despite its success. 77 new homes are on track to be built under NPARIH by June 2017, with 65 homes already completed (27 built by TSIRC). A further 76 houses are planned for construction between now and June 2018.

The total number of houses to be built by June 2018, under the NPARIH scheme sits at 153.

Providing adequate community housing positively impacts health, family wellbeing, employment and education – and is a ‘building block’ to meet the Closing the Gap targets.

### **Torres Strait Digital Expansion Project**

Mayor Gela is seeking Federal government commitment to enable full digital communications coverage of the Torres Strait.

Only 50% of the region has mobile coverage, and at a low bandwidth. This impacts on safety, business capability and economic development, education and health service provision.

Telstra has already funded \$7.1M and Queensland government has committed an additional \$2.1M. Mayor Gela is lobbying the Federal government to fund the remaining \$6.4M.

### **Treaty Zone Coordination Facility on Saibai**

Council continue to advocate for a new shared facility to be built on Saibai Island in the Torres Strait Treaty Zone, which lies between Australia and Papua New Guinea.

The purpose of the facility is to house Federal and State law enforcement and disease monitoring personnel. This will ensure Australia is actively providing early detection and response to risks



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such as Drug Resistant Tuberculosis, Zika virus, Rabies, Varroa mite and illegal cross-border movements.

It is vital to have a permanent presence at the frontier. Saibai Island is just 4km, or a 15-minute ride in a dinghy, from Papua New Guinea.

The Facility would be equally funded from Federal and State government stakeholders to ensure access for all working in the field.

### **Financial Assistance Grants Indexation**

TSIRC is lobbying in support of the Australian Local Government Association's (ALGA) call to restore indexation of Financial Assistance Grants to local governments.

The Financial Assistance Grants are one of the very few flexible funding options that allow local government to meet needs which are unique to their region.

These funds have been critical for TSIRC to effectively maintain, and replace, critical to life infrastructure including water storage tanks and lagoons so that clean drinking water is available for our communities.

Torres Strait Island Regional Council has lost nearly \$4M in revenue due to this freeze – an amount which has critical impacts on a remote Council.

Mayor Gela is calling on the Federal government to honour their commitment to restoring indexation in the 2017/18 Federal budget.

### **Climate adaptation**

The Torres Strait region is inundated with rising tides and extreme weather events with island communities being washed away. Regular flooding and public health risks are common occurrences.

To protect communities from coastal erosion, inundation by king tides and severe weather, major works are needed on five of our islands communities.

We are seeking a 50% contribution from the Federal government, to be matched by the State, to ensure these essential works take place.

*For further information, or to schedule an interview, please contact Manager Engagement, Bianca Barling - Seden on 0400 856 333 or [Bianca.Barling-Seden@tsirc.qld.gov.au](mailto:Bianca.Barling-Seden@tsirc.qld.gov.au)*



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