

MEDIA RELEASE

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PNG – Open Door Policy

To ensure the health and security of our local communities and mainland Australia a Shared Government Facility should be constructed at Saibai. It would permanently house Monitoring and Enforcement Personnel from Australian Border Force and the Queensland Police Service.

The urgency of this issue has been raised again after PNG officials seized a boat this month, near the Australian border. So far 8 men have been identified as victims of human trafficking, with numbers expected to increase. To reach Daru the boat would have had to travel either through the Torres Strait which rests within Australian Territorial waters or along the coastline of Papua New Guinea.

In response Mayor Gela said “This has been an issue for sometime now, it’s not the first time this has happened. A foreign fishing vessel with migrants on board came in as close as Channel Rock in front of Hammond Island where it was apprehended. Another foreign fishing vessel used as a people-mover had 13 migrants on board, ran aground on the back of Hammond, where they were tipped-off to authorities by local cray fisherman”

"People smuggling or border-hopping attempts in the Torres Strait are not a new venture, as this has been happening for a while. The question is what are we effectively doing about it?" "We've been using drones, we've been promised high-speed vessels, but it just doesn't seem to be working."

“The Australian Government has been throwing significant investment at Operation Sovereign Borders, Operation Relex I & II, providing enhanced surveillance, patrol & response operations in international waters between the Indonesian Archipelago & Australia, while we continue to be left exposed. All we need is an illuminated light with the word ‘Enter’ across it, so that we also dress the part - because Torres Strait is unsecured and abandoned." “We have a porous border, our communities are in a very vulnerable position and they need to be resourced appropriately.”

Council is not in a position to act as an enforcement agency to tackle unlawful activities of other nationals, contain Public Health outbreaks or provide protection to people at risk of human trafficking.

In its upcoming discussions with the Prime Minister and senior Ministers of the Australian Government, Council will be seeking greater commitment from the Commonwealth Government to protect its borders from unlawful activities and to protect the health and wellbeing for our Australian citizens in the Torres Strait.

Further information can be obtained by contacting our Community Engagement and Media Officer, Bianca Barling on 0400 856 333 or bianca.barling@tsirc.qld.gov.au