



MEDIA RELEASE

March 9, 2012

ABC 7.30 Report, Thursday March 8 – FALSE ALLEGATIONS

Torres Strait Island Regional Council on behalf of its constituents and the Torres Strait region would like to make an official complaint against the ABC's 7.30 Report "Dugongs cruelly slaughtered in illegal meat trade," aired on Thursday March 8.

Cr Gela said the report made false allegations and assumptions, was completely one-sided and offends the very culture and heritage of the Torres Strait people – but most importantly was annoyed that the Torres Strait were not given the opportunity to have a voice on the issue before it was aired.

A story based on assumptions and an individual making allegations based on a gut feeling is not ethically appropriate to be aired.

ABC should have known better and collated the facts and views from the relevant stakeholders and in our case the first Australians who are being victimized.

In the first instance, poly boxes are very regularly air-transported and filled with seafood for relatives in Cairns - such as fish, shellfish, crays and crabs which most likely were the contents of the Poly boxes filmed.

Considering there is no land mass in the Torres Strait for other protein consumables on any of the islands, with exorbitant prices being paid for basic necessities.

Protein resources are primarily obtained from the sea, which remain an important part of diet to all people of the Torres Strait.

One should not have to justify their livelihood and hunting methods that have gone on for generations to those who know nothing about it.

Unfortunately recent news of rudimentary regulations of Halal practices in Indonesia have taken the practice of hunting and gathering in the Torres Strait completely out of context.

Self regulation and subsistence remain the responsibility of all Councils within the Torres Strait and no doubt this particular article was offensive to most people because of the overview of a limited amount of people interviewed to create this story in the first place.

It shames many people without consideration of the circumstances and reality of tradition or customs.

The reporter who filmed and visited the Torres Strait has been reported to have asked numerous times to purchase dugong and/or turtle on various islands and was knocked back each and every time with the response that it is a traditional practice and the hunting and consumption of this meat is only for the traditional people of the Torres Strait, not for profit.

The report also failed to report that communities in the region have developed hunting policies in order to sustain the species.

There may be an issue enforcing and complying with these policies which the tiers of government are working together to build a framework around enforcing the policies.

Some communities have already commenced with the implementation of their Hunting Management Plans even to the extent where some discussions talked about a permit system that would be locally managed and granted and enforcement is hoped to be rolled out by our community police and even hopefully state police in some areas.

The report made the hunters look inhumane and cruel – yet I am sure the reporter has not hesitated to chow down on a big cheap hunk of steak in his own home.

He may reconsider biting down on his piece of steak if he observed the full process of cattle being put to sleep and culled prior to being packaged and well presented ready to be sold.

ENDS

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