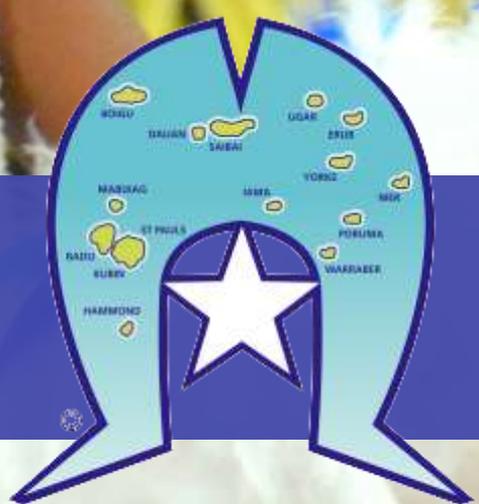




Queensland Government Deputations
October 2016



Torres Strait Island
REGIONAL COUNCIL



Communications – Mobile Coverage

Presented by: Mayor Fred Gela

Author: Torres Strait Island Regional Council

Presented: 4 – 7 October 2016

Recommendation:

That the Queensland Government:

- Provide a financial commitment to complete the much needed communications infrastructure expansion and upgrade, which will deliver full coverage critical to life communications across the Torres Strait.

Background:

The *Torres Strait Mobile Network Expansion Project (TSMNEP)* is an infrastructure upgrade designed to completely open up communications for *all* of our island communities.

Mobile coverage is only accessible for 50% of our region. This means that half of our people are without access to mobile coverage. Few people have desktop computers so there is limited access to high-cost low bandwidth satellite internet, which is only suitable for personal use. Large numbers of people have smart phones. Despite current poor coverage, social media is accessed widely via mobile devices. Once coverage increases, more extensive internet use will also occur via mobile devices.

Despite our current high-cost, low coverage environment Council is committed to facilitating internet access and digital literacy for our communities. Council has rolled out free public internet access (public terminals) in each of our 15 Council offices.

The current insufficient, out-dated communications infrastructure restricts personal use and basic business operations and opportunities, access to education and training, and health and essential services.

This has life threatening implications.

Key Issues:

Response to emergencies is greatly enhanced by availability of mobile coverage. People with stalled motors on their dinghies will be able to call to land rather than instigating a major search by setting off their EPIRB.

Health practitioners will be able to use 'telehealth' to conduct high-resolution specialist examinations. This saves on flights and accommodation to Thursday Island and mainland hospitals, which are disruptive to families and their carers.

Adequate mobile and internet access will open up a world of business and educational opportunities for the people of the Torres Strait. It will make possible:

- Delivery of online training and study off-campus
- Set up of online businesses that take our art and culture to the world

- Improvement in the reach and capability of all business operations in the region to strengthen economic development.

The total cost of the project is \$25.44 million. Telstra is contributing \$15 million, the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) and Department of Agriculture and Water Resources is contributing \$3.8 million leaving a much-needed shortfall of \$6.64 million.

The project is unable to begin until the additional \$6.64 million is secured.

Communications infrastructure upgrades will deliver multiple socio-economic, educational, health and community safety outcomes. The Australian Human Rights Commission agrees that the right to Internet access is critical in “redressing structural disadvantage”.

With full mobile communications coverage we will then be able to seek support to build personal and business digital literacy to enable our region’s business, educational, health, emergency response and personal digital usage needs.

