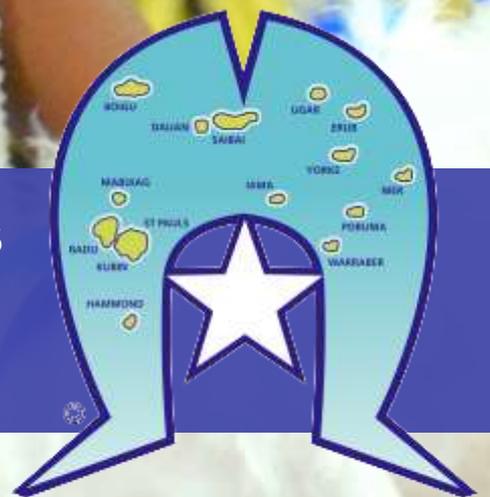




Queensland Government Deputations  
October 2016



**Torres Strait Island**  
REGIONAL COUNCIL



# International Border and the Torres Strait Treaty

**Presented by:** Mayor Fred Gela

**Author:** Torres Strait Island Regional Council

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## **Recommendation:**

That the Queensland Government:

- Scrutinise and hold accountable the program funds and deliverables committed to public health in Papua New Guinea
- Provide long term financial support to manage and address the risks and burdens of Treaty movements
- Jointly advocate with TSIRC to the Federal government for implementation of the recommendations of *The Torres Strait: Bridge and Border* report.

## **Background:**

The international border with Papua New Guinea is Australia's closest and most porous international border. Our border and our communities are in a very vulnerable position and need to be resourced appropriately.

To ensure the health and security of our local communities and mainland Australia, Council have been lobbying for a Shared Government Facility to be constructed at Saibai that would permanently house Monitoring and Enforcement Personnel from Australian Border Force, Australian Federal Police, Customs, Quarantine and Queensland Police Service.

The complexities of our local government area, and the impacts of the international border and Treaty arrangements on the Torres Strait, were acknowledged in the recommendations of the 2010 Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee report *The Torres Strait: Bridge and Border*.

***Numbers of Traditional visitors from PNG into the Torres Strait have swelled to 50,000 per annum.***

Currently, the elected Councillor in each community is responsible for verifying entry of Traditional Visitors into their respective communities. At 50,000 visitors per annum this is a significant administrative burden. TSIRC receives no financial compensation for performing this role.

The TSIRC region has a population of 5,200 across almost 1000 homes (925 of which are tenancy managed by TSIRC), and water and sewer infrastructure that does not even meet the requirements of this permanent population, much less so many additional visitors.

## **Key Issues:**

Adequate resourcing, monitoring, surveillance and strategic defence in our region are critical to the wellbeing and safety of our whole nation. Council is not in a position to act as an enforcement agency to tackle unlawful activities of other nationals, nor contain biosecurity or public health outbreaks.

There are significant health, infrastructure and service delivery demands on our region as a result of cross-border movement.

The PNG island of Daru has alarming levels of drug-resistant tuberculosis (TB). As reported by Harvard University physician and anthropologist Dr Jennifer Furin “I was seeing what I can only say is the worst outbreak of drug-resistant TB that I have ever witnessed”.

We acknowledge that both the Federal and State Governments commit significant funds and resources to the management of public health issues in Papua New Guinea.

Our Torres Strait communities are frequently visited by people from Daru and surrounding villages of PNG. The cost to our people and to the whole nation of drug-resistant TB becoming established in Australia far eclipses what is needed to establish comprehensive detection, prevention and treatment measures in the Torres Strait.

Cross-border movements further distress Council’s delivery of services including housing, drinking water, wastewater treatment and waste management. Our people also deal with international security breaches in the absence of detection by Federal and State agencies.

Without local engagement and participation in detecting risks, our nation is at threat, as local people understand and observe our communities and environment in ways no one else can.

Recruitment strategies that prioritise employing Torres Strait Islanders are vital both to the economy of the region, and to maintaining high levels of voluntary community engagement in surveillance and reporting of public health and other international border security risks.

