



Torres Strait Island
REGIONAL COUNCIL

ADVOCACY ACTION PLAN

sustainable • prosperous • liveable

Acknowledgement

Torres Strait Island Regional Council acknowledges Native Title holders, Elders past and present, and all members of the communities we serve within the five clusters of Zenadth Kes: Kemer Kemer Meriam Nation of the Eastern Islands, the Kulkalgal Nation of the Central Islands, Kaiwalagal Kaurareg Aboriginal Nation of the Inner Islands, Malulilgal Nation of the Western Islands, and the Gudaw Malulgal Nation of the Top Western Islands. We recognise their continuing connection to land and sea and the strength of a cultural heritage and belief system that spans past, present, and future generations. We also recognise all Torres Strait Islander people in the Region and on the Australian mainland.

Disclaimer

Disclaimer: Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal peoples should be aware that this publication may contain images or names of people who have since passed away. Council respects the right of families and communities to request the removal from subsequent publications of any image or name that causes distress.

July 2025

Front cover: Mabo Day celebration on Mer



*Dhamuw Koedal dance team
performing at CIAF 2025*



Youmpla **Vision**

For youmpla ples ene Council for meke something youmpla self sor long we can gad fruit them thing we makem e praper ene las long time.

For our Communities and Council to be autonomous, prosperous and sustainable.

Autonomous:

We achieve autonomy when we empower our people and community through rigorous engagement, consultation and participation. An autonomous Council fuels both local and regional self-sufficiency solutions.

Prosperous:

We are prosperous when we are flourishing, thriving, or have success. Prosperity can be in our faith, culture, traditions, happiness, fortune, health and wellbeing.

Sustainable:

We are sustainable when we deliver social, economic or environmental solutions that enhance current community needs and long term aspirations.

Youmpla **Mission**

For youmpla for strete ples blo youmpla ene weis kaine youmpla stap lor pless blo youmpla.

To improve our Communities' liveability in all we do.

Liveability:

Liveability is the sum of factors that add up to a community's quality of life. This includes the built and natural environment, economic prosperity, social stability and equity, educational opportunity; as well as cultural, entertainment and recreational possibilities.



*Torres Strait Islander playing
a traditional drum*

Message from the Mayor

I acknowledge our Traditional Owners, our Elders past and present and all of our community members across the length and breadth of Zenadth Kes, from where the sun rises on Mer in our East, to where the sun sets on Boigu in our West.

I also recognise all First Nations people throughout Australia, acknowledging our shared connection to the land, sea and cultural practice that has existed as long as we have. Torres Strait Island Regional Council (TSIRC) is unique.

Our geography, remoteness and the unique characteristics of our five nation clusters inform a Council with responsibilities that transcend the traditional Council core business of “roads, rates and rubbish”.

TSIRC is deeply engaged in the provision of aged care, child care and community services. We continue to direct significant resources to strategically developing local enterprise and we are invested in the continued pursuit of regional governance.

We are fundamental to the social, economic and environmental sustainability of our region and we serve our communities with an independent future always front of mind.

Our first ever Councillors meeting in 1937 established a blueprint for an open and engaging communication at all levels of government – and articulating our advocacy priority areas each year is a continuation of that respectful and informed dialogue.

The Advocacy Action Plan articulates Council’s 11 Point Plan critical to achieving our mission: Advancing our unique region to be sustainable, prosperous and liveable for all of our communities.

I look forward to the opportunity to discuss these priorities in more detail.

Cr Phillemon Mosby
Mayor
Torres Strait Island Regional Council





Malungu Yangu Wakay

THE VOICE FROM THE DEEP

THE MASIG STATEMENT

23 August 2022

PURPOSE

To establish principles and parameters on behalf of the peoples of the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area to act together in unity, in order to pursue and achieve self-determination and regional autonomy and, in so doing, preserve our distinctive and diverse spiritual, material and economic relationship with the lands, territories, waters, coastal seas and other resources with which we have a connection under Ailan Kastom and Aboriginal tradition.

AIMS

1. In accordance with Article 3 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 13th September 2007 and supported by the Australian Government on 3rd April 2009 and the Preamble of the Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld), we seek to achieve our right to self-determination as the peoples of the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area.
2. By virtue of our sovereign right, we have the right to freely determine our political status and to freely pursue our economic, social and cultural development.
3. In keeping with Article 4 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in exercising our right to self-determination, we have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to our internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.
4. Therefore, we will create partnerships with Key Regional Stakeholders, the Queensland and Australian governments together with other relevant organisations to better equip us to work together to achieve our regional goals and aspirations; and in working together as representatives of the peoples of the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area obtain and safeguard our human rights enshrined in international, national and Queensland law.

PAST

23 August 1937 was the beginning of regional autonomy – The Torres Strait Island Councillors Conference.

PRESENT

23 August 2022 is the beginning of a new beginning, a culturally united path to regional sovereignty - The MASIG Statement.

FUTURE

23 August 2037 will be the beginning of regional sovereignty.



85th Anniversary of First Councillors Conference in Masig



Advancing our unique region to be sustainable, prosperous and liveable for all of our communities

The prosperity of our future generations is dependent on the actions we take now. Advancing our region to be more than simply liveable and sustainable, means investing in our people and community.

A sustainable region means our pristine environment is protected, and that we are investing in building a circular economy through diversification, innovation and courage.

A liveable region means that our people and region are connected and accessible. It means place based approaches considering our unique environment, needs and culture, ensuring our community is healthy and thriving.

A prosperous region means attracting and retaining investment, having strong workforce capability and capacity, creating jobs and a strong economic future for our communities.

Our 15 distinct and unique communities are faced daily with challenges like no other region in Queensland, if not Australia. If both state and federal government incessantly continue to cost shift and underfund our region, without adequately addressing our unique environment and basic human needs, there is no future for our region or our council.

The real key to our region not just surviving but actually thriving, is having both upper levels of government acknowledge and accept, and then commit to taking responsibility and funding us appropriately – thus allowing council to focus on our most valuable asset – our people and communities.

The outlook if nothing changes

We will be financially unsustainable by 2028.

Our critical infrastructure will continue to decline and deteriorate to a point of failure.

The health and wellbeing of our community will decline, and our people will suffer.

Our pristine environment will decline and no longer be protected.



*Torres Strait Islander family
playing at sunset*



11 Steps to prosperity

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Our uniqueness at a glance



We are **15** island communities with **4,000+** people



We are situated between the northern most tip of mainland Australia to the south of PNG



We are a place of national and international significance



We speak **26** traditional languages and dialects



We are represented by **1** Mayor and **15** councillors, elected by our communities



We have **\$2.3 billion** in base assets and deliver **\$80 million** in operating expenditure and **\$60 million** in capital works



We have a workforce of **368** employees with **80%** living in community



We have over **700+** community houses to support



We have **15** seaports, **13** helipads, **11** aerodromes



We operate **15** water treatment plants, **12** wastewater facilities, **15** waste management centres



We run **15** environmental health and biosecurity programs, **13** fuel outlets



We service **15** cemeteries, **2** childcare centres, **3** arts and cultural centres **15** post outlets, **10** Indigenous Knowledge Centres, **24** accommodation facilities, **10+** home support services



We manage **13** communities as Deed of Grant in Trust (DOGIT) trustee



We are committed to ensuring compliance with native title laws across all **15** of our island communities



We manage **23,000+** border movements annually

Mabo Day celebration on Mer, 2022







Priority area one

Safe, accessible and affordable transport infrastructure



Why this matters

Every community deserves to be an accessible one. Our transport infrastructure is aged and deteriorating. Our people need to be able to travel between communities across the Torres Strait safely, and reliably at a cost they can afford. We need to be able to get even the most basic of food, supplies, healthcare and education to our communities.

We are challenged by logistical complexities associated with remote island locations, climate change impacts, and infrastructure. These factors have a significant impact on costs.

What are we asking for?

We need adequate funding to ensure wharves, jetties, barge ramps, access channels, roads, airstrips and helipads are serviceable.

We need adequate funding to support a transport subsidy program for the Torres Strait. In addition, funding to identify sustainable transport solutions including:

- \$100,000 each for a Business Plan for a Dauan and Ugar vessel
- \$70,000 for a Hammond Island Feasibility Study

We need over \$250 million over five years, identified in councils Five-Year Strategic Investment Plan (2025–29) to address urgent transport infrastructure needs.

- \$66 million for 10 priority road projects
- \$120 million for urgent replacement of eight jetties
- Over \$12 million to refurbish five barge ramps
- \$45 million for priority channel dredging of five channels
- \$8 million for resealing of three runways

What is the impact for our communities?

Having safe, reliable and affordable transport infrastructure will improve health, education, food security and economic development.

It will provide equitable access for our most vulnerable and support traditional cultural practices.

It will enable council and other levels of government to provide essential services to community.

It will support safe management of border security operations.

To whom are we asking?

We are asking the state and federal governments to provide the necessary funding to address our deteriorating and failing transport infrastructure.

Did you know?

It costs approximately \$12 million for just a basic wharf that provides disability/equitable access.

It costs \$1,500 per metre just to fix our roads.

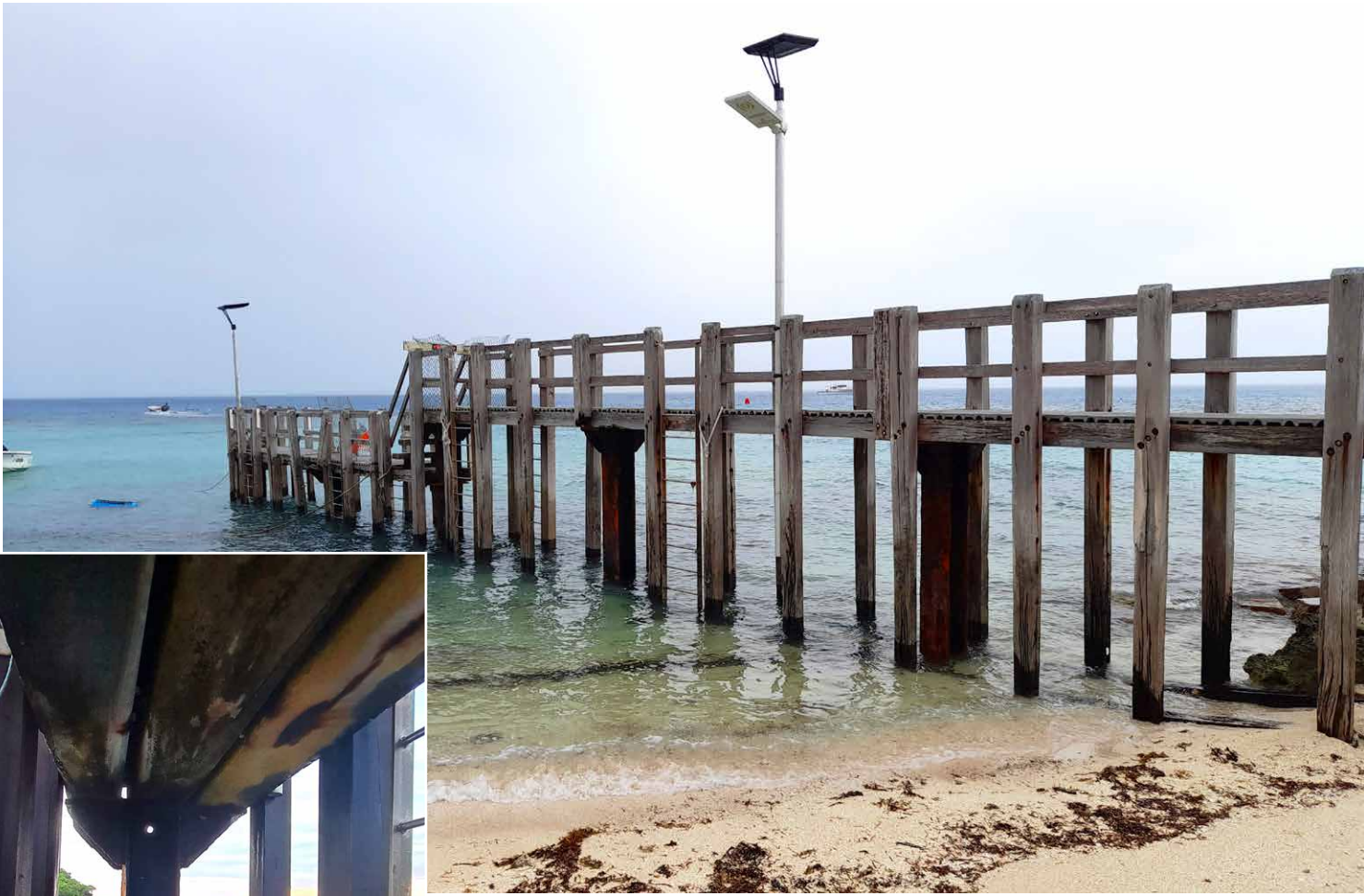
The freight of a \$36,000 garbage truck from Cairns to Badu is approximately \$33,000.

The average weekly household income in the Torres Strait is \$976.

It costs up to \$40 to travel from Hammond Island to Thursday Island just to go to work each day by boat. For most, marine transport is the only affordable option. In many parts of Queensland, you can now travel for 50 cents.

One of our island communities receives food delivery once a month, dependent on tide. This community lacks a dredged channel for access, and in terms of air transport is only accessible by helicopter.

Two of our Islands (Dauan and Ugar) are only accessible by helicopter. Through an annual agreement, Council administers a subsidy scheme in partnership with Torres Strait Regional Authority to provide access for these residents.



The Torres Strait is calling
for safe, equitable and
accessible communities



Priority area two

Sustainable waste management



Why this matters

Every community deserves to have responsible waste management. Our landfills across our 15 island communities are overflowing posing significant health risks to our people and our environment. Our communities are spread across 42,000km² of ocean making waste management challenging. Council operates across two biosecurity zones, which makes the efficient transport of waste more complex and challenging to manage.

What are we asking for?

We need funding to build sustainable waste management systems for our communities to manage all waste types. We need the draft Straits and Northern Peninsula Regional Waste Management Plan adopted by the state government and additional funding to develop a TSIRC specific Waste Management Plan and accompanying Implementation Plan.

We need \$57.5 million

- \$3.5 million to develop a waste management prototype committed to one island
- \$42 million to roll out a proven system across all 15 communities
- \$12 million for staged closure of landfills
- Ongoing investment to support whole of life waste operations

To whom are we asking?

We are asking the state government to partner with the Torres Strait to build sustainable waste infrastructure and programs for the health of our people and environment, aligned to the Department of Environment and Science and Innovations policy document '*Respecting Country - A Sustainable waste strategy for First Nations communities*'.

What is the impact for our communities?

Having access to recycling, composting and responsible waste management will improve the health, safety and sustainability of our people and protect our natural

Did you know?

Our landfills are situated close to high-value receptors like drinking water sources and coral reef systems, increasing health risks.

Several landfills become inundated with sea water during king tides, spreading contaminants into the environment and marine ecosystems.

The majority of the islands do not have available land for landfill sites.

Fifty-nine per cent (59%) of waste currently going to landfill could be composted or recycled.

With large distances between islands and limited resources, waste is rarely removed from the Torres Strait, compounding the issue. Only commercial wastes such as medical and building materials are removed off island for disposal.

Operating across two biosecurity zones increases the risk of pest and disease spread through mismanaged waste.

Despite the state and federal governments net-zero goals, Indigenous and remote communities like ours face limited support, leading to unsustainable waste practices.

Managing 15 landfills across 42,000km² is financially unsustainable, and funding is urgently needed for new, sustainable waste management systems.



Waste management operations



The Torres Strait
is calling for better
waste management



Priority area three Regional social housing



Why this matters

Every community deserves to have adequate housing for those in need. Access to safe and affordable housing is critical in Closing the Gap, enabling strong, resilient and liveable communities. Many in our community suffer from overcrowding and homelessness and our people's health and safety is at risk.

What are we asking for?

We need support, partnership and investment to address our housing crisis. We have sites identified for new homes and we can deliver if adequate funding can be secured. In 2024, we finalised the TSIRC Social Housing Strategy 2024, after working with the Department of Housing and Public Works. We will be using this strategy to develop a future social housing construction program for Zenadth Kes.

At present, we need \$703 million over the next 10 years to address our housing crisis.

- \$134 million for immediate needs due to homelessness, domestic violence, child safety, disability or medical needs
- \$325 million due to overcrowding
- \$142 million needed for community members to be able to relocate back into community
- \$40 million to reclaim and remove 50+ uninhabitable houses caused from deterioration and asbestos

Did you know?

TSIRC is the largest social housing service provider in Queensland.

We have 700+ social houses on 14 Islands separated by 42,000km² of ocean.

There are currently 233 housing applications for people in desperate need of a home.

There are a further 253 housing applications for our people trying to relocate back to community.

These housing applications are from people suffering from overcrowding, homelessness, child safety and medical issues.

Over 100 houses are uninhabitable and condemned - many with asbestos.

To whom are we asking?

We are asking the state and federal governments to partner with the Torres Strait to address this critical housing need.

What is the impact for our communities?

Building adequate and safe social housing will reduce the impacts of domestic violence, long term health risks and improve the wellbeing of our community.

Our people can continue to live on our own land, in our own communities, maintaining cultural connection to land and people.

Through robust community consultation, fit for purpose housing has been designed, meeting the liveability needs of our community by:

- Sustainably appropriate designs that can endure the harsh environmental conditions
- 'Listen, learn and adapt' supporting traditional and cultural practices and customs
- Longevity of infrastructure to last well beyond the years of previous builds



The Torres Strait is
calling for safe and
affordable social housing

Building homes in the Torres Strait

It costs approx. \$2.3m to build a 4 bed 2 bath house in the Torres Strait. Let's take a look at how this adds up:

- \$800,000 for the manufacturing (offsite in Cairns)
- \$500,000 in freight and logistics
- \$200,000 craneage on site
- \$200,000 connection to services
- \$500,000 site works
- \$140,000 in Native Title

**This doesn't include demolition of existing infrastructure which can be in excess of \$500,000.*

New houses built off island mean minimal to no waste on island.

Traditional builds take 3-5 months, newly designed builds take 3-4 weeks.

New builds are expected to last 30+ years longer than previous builds.



Priority area four

Climate change response



Why this matters

The Torres Strait is uniquely placed to be a world leader in the response to climate change. We are vulnerable to the effects of climate change such as tidal inundation and erosion, which puts our critical infrastructure and places of cultural and historical significance at risk.

We have recently completed the Coastal Hazard Adaptation Strategy (CHAS), which highlights the urgent need for coastal hazard adaptation actions, including the construction of vital infrastructure to protect our islands.

We are reliant on electricity from diesel-run power stations, yet need to ensure we are not only future proofing for our environment but taking the necessary steps to building sustainable, affordable and resilient communities.

What are we asking for?

We need funding to enable the implementation of actions highlighted in the CHAS, which includes funding for coastal defences and critical infrastructure adaptation to mitigate the impacts of rising sea levels and extreme weather events.

We need staged funding to complement coastal protection works to our vulnerable communities (beyond the current program).

We need \$500,000 to undertake design works for coastal defences in vulnerable communities like Badu, Mabuiag, Mer, and Erub, addressing erosion and protecting infrastructure.

We need an estimated \$50 million over the next 10 years to undertake coastal defence works on our island communities.

We need investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency projects to reduce our dependence on diesel-run power stations and support the transition to sustainable energy systems.

To whom are we asking?

We are asking the state and federal governments to partner with the Torres Strait to ensure we can play our part in building sustainable communities, along with meeting the state and federal renewable and energy targets.

What is the impact for our communities?

By investing in coastal protection and renewable energy infrastructure now, we can safeguard our pristine environment, protect culturally significant sites, and ensure the long-term sustainability of the Torres Strait.

Did you know?

Regional sea levels are rising two to three times faster than the global average, increasing the frequency of tidal surges and storms, which accelerates coastal erosion and puts our communities at risk.

The Torres Strait region produces 34,175 tonnes of CO²-e annually, largely a result of the 16 megalitres of diesel fuel consumed.

The Torres Strait has a per capita carbon emission of 5.6 tonnes of CO²-e from power generation, compared to the Australian average of 4.04 tonnes and the global average of 1.1 tonnes.

Frequent brownouts cause power loss, disrupting daily life and essential services.

During monsoon, rough seas and high tides are removing land and threatening essential infrastructure in our communities such as housing, cemeteries, water dams etc.

During recent high tides, remains are being washed out of cemeteries and our people are having to re-bury remains in higher ground.

In 2021, Council had to relocate two families due to high tides damaging to their properties.



The Torres Strait is
calling for the protection
of our environment and
communities

In September 2022, the United Nations Human Rights Committee found that the Australian Govt. is violating human rights obligations to Torres Strait Islanders by failing to act on climate change.

Please see the #torresstrait8 campaign.

The decision marked the first time an international court has found:

- A country violated human rights through inadequate climate policy
- A nation state has been found responsible for their emissions under internal human rights law
- Peoples' right to culture has been found to be at risk from climate impacts



Mer's coastline



Priority area five

Reinstate local government funding



Why this matters

Every community deserves to have well-funded essential services. Council will always struggle to deliver vital services to community while it is not appropriately funded. Financial Assistance Grants enable Council to meet the very basics of liveability and with this funding in continual decline, along with cost shifting of non-local government services passed on to Council financial, our financial sustainability and our communities are at risk.

What are we asking for?

Restore Financial Assistance Grants to at least 1% of federal taxation revenue. It is currently 0.55%.

Recognise the uniqueness of the Torres Strait and change the allocation methodology to ensure TSIRC gets its fair share.

What is the impact for our communities?

Increased funding will help the council rectify aging, deteriorating and failing critical infrastructure.

Increased funding will ensure the council can continue to provide core services to our communities, such as safe and reliable drinking water and driveable roads.

This will support liveability in our communities.

To whom are we asking?

We are asking the federal government to increase Financial Assistance Grants.

We are asking the state government to adjust the allocation methodology.

Did you know?

TSIRC suffers from significant cost shifting from state and federal governments for providing services that are not core business.

These include the provision of fuel, aged care, childcare, Centrelink agency services, Australia Post operations, social housing, supporting border security, and maintaining essential infrastructure such as aerodromes, marine facilities, coastal defence and adaptation, council accommodation and power cards.

TSIRC manages \$2.3 billion worth of assets and is currently facing an overall operational deficit of \$1.4 million, excluding depreciation.

The engineering department alone is experiencing a significant loss of \$20.5 million (before depreciation).

Fuel supply operations to 10 communities have contributed nearly \$1 million in losses.





GELAR META
GED SIKERARMEM

OPEN

The Torres strait
demands decent
funding for our
communities' liveability



Priority area six

Regional governance



Why this matters

The Torres Strait region operates under excessive and inefficient governance practices, driven by duplication and bureaucracy.

The volume of cost shifting by state and federal governments to council is hurting our community. We have been providing many state and federal services to community for many years, with much of it either unfunded or inadequate funding provided. It is time formally recognise the broader remit of our region and the part we play.

Significant reform is needed to enable us to govern our own affairs, as outlined in the Torres Strait Regional Authority's Regional Assembly Transition Plan (2018).

A key pillar of this transition is the acknowledgement of our traditional regional name 'Zenadth Kes'.

What are we asking for?

Formal endorsement to change our local government name to Zenadth Kes Regional Council and place name to Zenadth Kes.

Formal recognition of the rights of the people of the Torres Strait to elect and be governed by a Regional Assembly.

Funding to enable the smooth transition from the current governing practice to the Zenadth Kes Regional Assembly.

Appropriate levels of funding from the state and federal government to ensure the future of our region.

What is the impact for our communities?

Recognising our unique Ailan Kustom, which is now recognised by the Australian Judicial and Legislative System as our inalienable right, supports the transition aspirations of the people of the Torres Strait to be realised.

Establishing a Regional Assembly model of government would enable greater autonomy to discharge local, state and commonwealth powers under one governing entity.

Funding us appropriately means that our region is not left behind.

To whom are we asking?

We are seeking support from the Queensland Government to change our name and boundary.

We are seeking support from the federal government to work with us to make this historic and important change in how we are governed.

Did you know?

The introduction of the Meriba Omasker Kasiw Kazipa (Torres Strait Islander Child Rearing Practice) Act 2020, formally identified the nexus between *lore* and *law*.

The Act signifies true acknowledgement of traditional governance and language and progression from the Mabo decision.

Council formally endorsed the local government and place name change during a special meeting on 28 July 2020.

The Zenadth Kes Statement was made at Masig on the 85th anniversary of the first councillors meeting on the 23 August 2022.



The Torres Strait is
calling for recognition
of our unique region

Women of the Kemer Kemer
Meriam Nàtion



Priority area seven

Digital connectivity



Why this matters

Our communities deserve to stay connected, have access to health services, be prepared for disaster management and enabled for local economic development.

Conventional, dated and unreliable telecommunications simply do not meet the needs of the Torres Strait, resulting in divided communities, reduced economic activity, limited social inclusion and impacting access to essential services.

Full fibre high speed connectivity from the mainland to Thursday Island and between each of the islands communities is essential to liveability.

What are we asking for?

We need immediate support to upgrade our basic telephone services and data access to all outer island communities.

We need bipartisan support for investing in our region to support regional remote and inter-island infrastructure development.

We need a digital local government and rural/remote telecommunications program to improve technology and connectedness, improving liveability.

Did you know?

Our islands experience communications blackouts throughout the year, sometimes all 15 islands at the same time. It is more frequent during monsoon season, when connectivity is either very weak or unstable due to heavy rains, strong winds and or storms. This not only impacts our schools and health services, but council operations and other government contractors who fly in/out across the region.

It can take anywhere up to 4-7 days for our communications service provider to visit the island to identify the problem and order parts to enable a fix, compounding the remoteness for our communities.

Our children have no choice but to leave community for grades 7 to 12 to continue their education, missing out on important social and cultural nurturing and education.

To whom are we asking?

We are asking state and federal governments to work with the Torres Strait and industry to invest and fund connectivity in our region.

What is the impact for our communities?

- Improved telehealth services and access to emergency services, as well as the overall health and wellbeing of our community
- Improved safety of our community, now able to respond to disasters and business continuity for local businesses, council infrastructure and essential services
- Enables our communities to embrace opportunities that support economic development, securing our future
- Improved management of critical infrastructure such as our water treatment systems to provide safe and reliable drinking water
- Reduced cost of expensive and unaffordable travel, associated expenditure and economic impact to our communities



The Torres strait
is calling for our
communities to
be connected

Digital programs at the Indigenous
Knowledge Centres (IKCs)



Priority area eight

Local prosperity and enterprise development



Why this matters

Every community deserves to be enabled to build sustainable and prosperous economies. The Torres Strait is one of the most socio-economic disadvantaged areas in Australia, with low levels of education and low incomes.

We are uniquely placed for industries such as commercial fishing, aquaculture, sustainable farming, tourism, arts and culture. Investment, resourcing and support with development to overcome commercial and social barriers is critical to creating industry growth and regional prosperity.

What are we asking for?

\$200,000 to support the development of a long-term Economic Development Strategic Action Plan - Phase 2.

\$150,000 annually to fund an Economic Development Officer to support the region to deliver the outcomes identified in the strategy.

Subsidised freight or tax concessions for produce out of the Torres Strait to enable industry growth.

Incentives to encourage private sector investment into the Torres Strait in activities such as:

- Renewables energy and emission reduction solutions
- Digital development and smart tech pilot programs
- The development of our tourism industry
- Deregulation to foster new aquaculture and farming opportunities

Commitment to work with Council on place-based economic, social and environmental opportunities

To whom are we asking?

The state and federal government to enable and support economic development in our region.

What is the impact for our communities?

Economic development is key to regional prosperity, providing community with local jobs for local people, supporting our people to stay on country and creating opportunities for future generations.

It enables us to grow on our own, a fundamental step in Closing the Gap supporting self-determination. This helps keep the dollars in the region, driving economic output and improving liveability for our communities.

Did you know?

Council is the largest employer in the region, 86% Council's workforce identifies as Torres Strait Islander or Aboriginal descent and 80% of Council's workforce are based in community

Torres Strait Gross Regional Product was \$125 million in 2024. *See Torres Strait Island Profile.*

Out of the 73 businesses in the Torres Strait, 27.4% relate to the construction industry (10.2% above the Queensland average).

Total employment for the region for 2023 was 986, 11% down on the 5 year comparison 1,111 (2018).

Job seeker increased by 7% in 2023 to 31%, in comparison to 24% in 2020.

The Torres Strait is listed 15th lowest on the Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage Index in Queensland.



The Torres Strait is
calling for investment into
building a prosperous and
sustainable region



Priority area nine

International border protection



Why this matters

The Torres Strait is one of Australia's most critical regions for border protection due to geographic location, proximity to international border and fragile marine reef ecology.

Well-funded and strong border protection is critical in managing biosecurity, illegal immigration and illegal fishing.

Successful border security relies on fit for purpose response vessels, helicopters and supporting infrastructure and operations – which is currently lacking in the Torres Strait.

What are we asking for?

We are asking the federal government to fund appropriate infrastructure in the Top Western Islands to ensure council is not impacted from the increased border movements during crises.

We are also asking them to provide ongoing investment to support operational hubs to enhance reach, vessel service provisioning and response times.

We want ongoing investment to ensure our critical marine infrastructure can support appropriate vessel classes to service the region.

We are also asking the federal government to provide a permanent security presence in the Torres Strait region to assure the protection of international borders and adjacent zones.

To whom are we asking?

We are asking the federal government to provide certainty and adequate funding for our role in protecting our borders.

What is the impact for our communities?

Well-funded border security ensures the safety of our communities.

Well-funded border security will help protect our environment and natural resources.

Well-funded border security will reduce cost shifting which takes away from our communities' liveability.

Did you know?

Under the Torres Strait Treaty, Island Councillor approval is required for movements within treaty villages on the PNG side of the border.

There are 23,000+ border movements every year in the Torres Strait. Some are entering illegally as they are not from the 13 coastal villages included in the Treaty. Each community visit experiences overstayers, PNG nationals breach the permit and treaty conditions regularly. Local law enforcement (ABF/Police) have limited powers to move them on.

The two fast response vessels located at Horn Island only operate during standard business hours. The Bay Class vessels and helicopters cannot cover the 42,000km² ocean footprint of the Torres Strait.

Illegal weapons and illicit drugs enter Australia through the region from Papua New Guinea due to lack of monitoring and presence of authorities. Illegal fishing has free reign. This happens at least a couple of times per week.

Community members are performing the role of Border Force and regularly risking their lives to act on behalf of Authorities in order to keep community and Australia safe.

The Top Western islands (Boigu, Saibai and Dauan) experience unexpected drop-ins at the health centres, putting further strain on our already lacking health services.



The Torres strait demands
that the federal government
take control of border security



Priority area ten

Healthcare and wellbeing services



Why this matters

Every community deserves to have access to health care. This is a right of every Australian. Closing the Gap means ensuring our community is not left behind. The Torres Strait faces ongoing barriers to accessing health services, we don't have access to preventative information and programs impacting our quality of life.

What are we asking for?

The necessary funding to implement the local area health plans for each island community.

Increased service reach, through upgrading facilities and infrastructure, connectivity and smart tech to enable better access to health care.

An audit of all health-related services and programs across the region to identify and address duplication and/or gaps.

Streamlined and sustainable funding arrangements to ensure services and preventative measures are meeting the needs of our communities.

An outer island health care model encompassing solutions for elderly and disabled residents, safe housing for victims of domestic violence or abuse and mental health support.

To whom are we asking?

We are asking the state and federal government to step up and provide the necessary funding and support to address the health crisis in the Torres Strait.

What is the impact for our communities?

The health of our communities will continue to tell a story about funding and prioritisation. As funding improves, so will health outcomes.

Better health services will improve the quality of life for our people and increase life expectancy, enabling our people to be productive and engaged, supporting the overall wellbeing of our communities and region.

The majority of our top 10 strategic priorities relate in some way to better health outcomes for the people of the Torres Strait.

Did you know?

Sixty-one years is our average life expectancy in the Torres Strait, 19 years below the Queensland average.

Elected leaders of the Torres Strait have petitioned the state government to return the Torres Model of Health, a model developed by and for our region. The current model of care significantly impacts our people, resulting in many preventable deaths due to cuts in funding for vital services across the region.

In the first six months of a year, the region can experience up to 45 funerals. Council supports community with funeral and associated costs, because of the unaffordable costs for families who are experiencing loss and financial stress.



*The Torres Strait
demands decent health
care for our region*

**The health of our
communities will continue
to tell a story about funding
and prioritisation. As
funding improves, so will
health outcomes.**

Elders of our communities



Priority area eleven

Water security and water infrastructure



Why this matters

Every community needs water security. Our water and wastewater infrastructure is debilitated and failing. A compromised water supply network jeopardises clean water access, essential for health and sanitation for our communities. Safe and readily available water is important for public health, whether it is used for drinking, domestic use, food production or recreational purposes.

What are we asking for?

We need \$68 million over five years, identified in Council's Five-Year Strategic Investment Plan (2025–29) to address urgent water infrastructure needs.

We need \$52 million for sewerage plant upgrades on five of our islands.

We need \$10 million for water reservoirs on two of our islands.

We need \$6 million cyber security water telemetry upgrades.

We need immediate funding to undertake a desalination intake planning study on Boigu, a sewerage reticulation condition assessment on Saibai, and a sewerage scheme planning study on Hammond.

To whom are we asking?

We are asking the state and federal governments to provide the necessary funding to address our deteriorating and failing water infrastructure network.

What is the impact for our communities?

Drinking safe and clean water is critical to community liveability. Improved water infrastructure means less expenditure on health, as people are less likely to fall ill and incur medical costs and are better able to remain economically productive.

Did you know?

All 15 communities rely on their own separate water collection, treatment, and distribution systems.

Many of our communities are heavily reliant on water sourced from permanent and mobile desalination plants.

The cost to produce water is between three and seven times that of the cost of producing water on the mainland.

Most of our water infrastructure is over 35 years old and Council does not have the funding to renew.

Water leaks and losses range between 20% and 70% of total water production.

Our communities are subject to water restrictions for approximately 6 months of the year. We even have to turn water off outside peak demand times to limit leaks





KLY

Kalaw Kawaw Ya dialect

TOP WESTERN - Gudaw Malulgal N

BOIGU
(Talbot Is.)

DAUAN
(Mt. Cornwallis Is.)

KLY

Kala Lagaw Ya
Language Group

WESTERN - Malulilgal Nation

MABUIAG
(Jervis Is.)

BADU
(Mulgrave Is.)

MUA Island

WUG
(St Pauls Community)

KLY

Mabuyag dialect

KUBIN Community

INNER - Kaiwalagal Kaurareg Aboriginal Nation

KIRIRRI
(Hammond Is.)

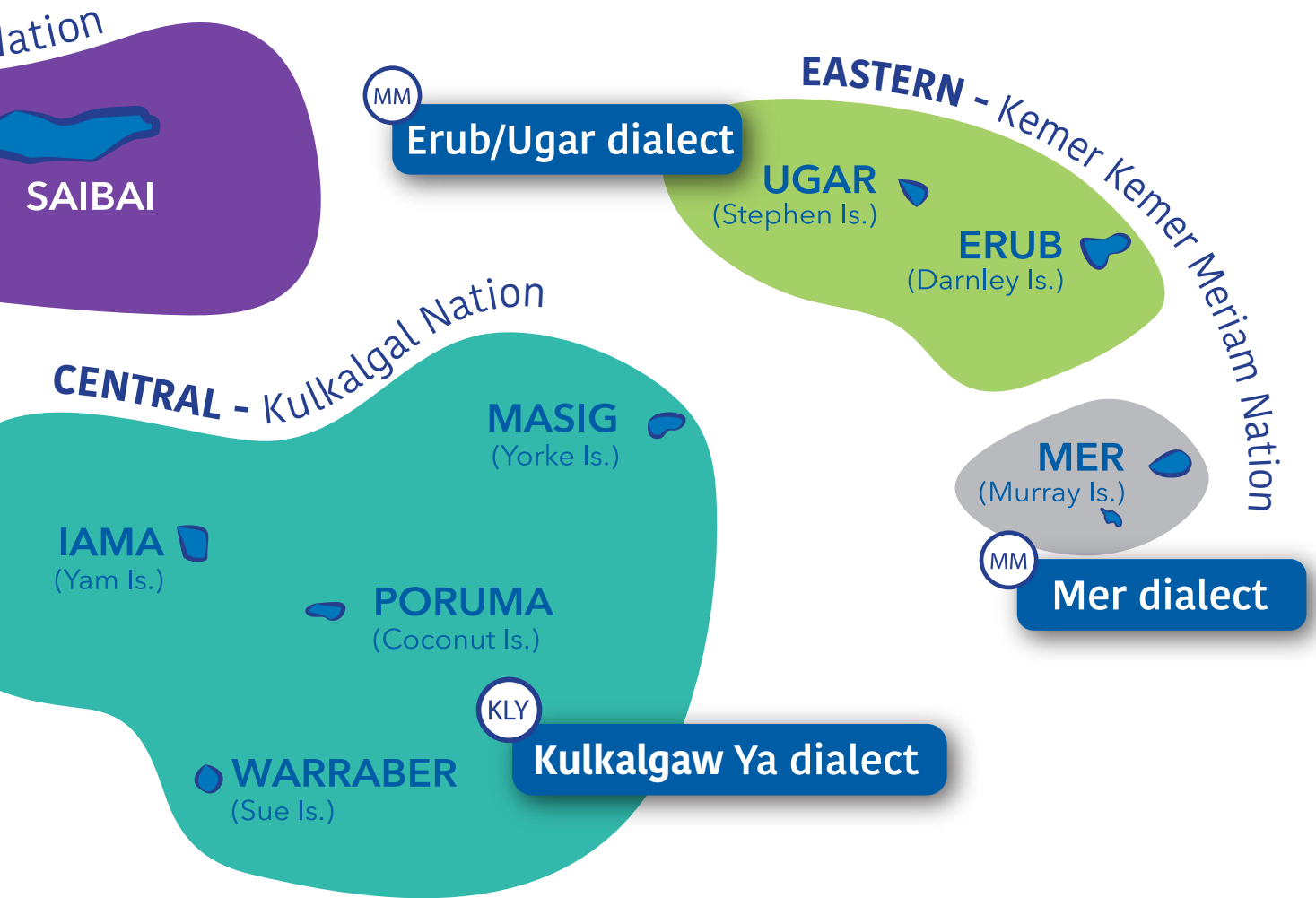
Waibene
(Thursday Is.)

KLY

Kaurareg

Cape York Peninsula

Miriam Mir/Mer Language Group



g dialect





Torres Strait Island
REGIONAL COUNCIL

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