

Torres Strait Island
REGIONAL COUNCIL

2025

August

TORRES STRAIT ISLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
Phase 1

Funded by: Torres Strait Regional Authority



TSRA
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Proposal Summary

Name Of Proposal	TSIRC Economic Development Community Engagement (Phase 1)
Location Of Proposal	Torres Strait communities including Boigu, Dauan, Saibai, Mabuiag, Badu, St Pauls, Kubin, Kirri, Warraber, Iama, Poruma, Masig, Ugar, Erub & Mer.
Proposal Owner	Torres Strait Island Regional Council
Client Lead	Mr David Brown Economic Development Lead
Client-Project Number	210011-03
Document start date	10 February 2025

Document Control

Prepared by	Peter Lettieri Infrastructure Lead John Palmer Managing Director
Reviewed by	Kerry Dixon Senior Associate
Client/Project Lead	John Palmer Managing Director
Organisation	Emver Partners info@emver.com.au www.emver.com.au

Version History

Ver. No.	Date	Created Or Changed By	Nature Of Amendment
0.1	10/02/2025	PL – Emver	Initial Draft commences
0.2	31/07/2025	JP – Emver	Finalisation of Initial Draft
0.3	01/08/2025	DB – TSIRC	First Draft issued to client for review
0.4	01/08/2025	CB – Emver	Graphic Design integration
0.5	07/08/2025	DB – TSIRC	Final Graphic Version for client review
1.0			Final version - ACCEPTED

Acknowledgment Of Country



Through this document, its authors, contributors and stakeholders, we pay our respects to this land's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestors, their spirit and legacy. The foundations laid by these ancestors - our First Nations peoples - give strength, inspiration and courage to current and future generations to create a better Queensland.

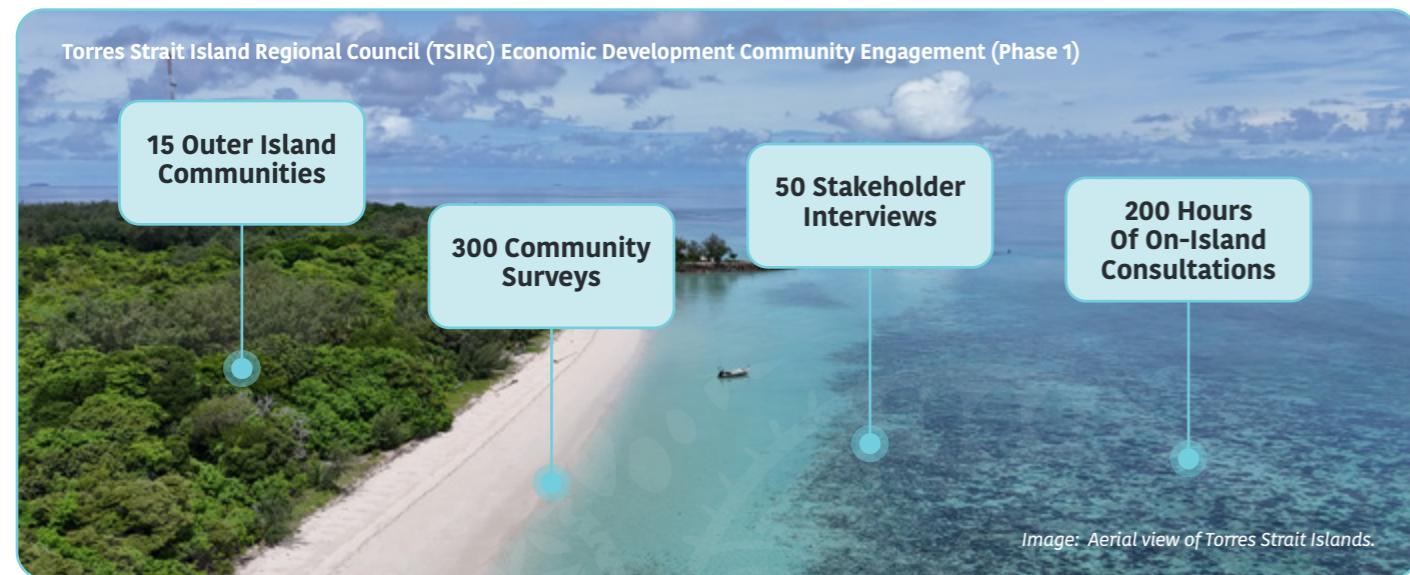
We acknowledge that Traditional Owners across Zenadh Kes (Torres Strait). We acknowledge the past and present elders of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and respect their unbroken culture and lore.

We further acknowledge the Kaurareg Traditional Owners, the Traditional Owners of the Kaiwalagal area (Inner Islands of the Torres Strait), from where this document was created and developed.

Executive Summary

OVERVIEW

The Torres Strait Island Regional Council (TSIRC) Economic Development Community Engagement (Phase 1) report presents the most comprehensive economic engagement process ever undertaken across the Outer Islands of the Torres Strait region. Spanning all 15 outer island communities, the initiative captured over 300 community surveys, 50 stakeholder interviews and more than 200 hours of on-island consultations, resulting in a robust and locally grounded foundation to inform long-term economic development planning.



Why It Matters

The Torres Strait is one of the most unique regions in Australia - geographically dispersed, culturally diverse and strategically significant. Each island has distinct characteristics, including variations in proximity to services, landforms, transportation infrastructure, and economic opportunities. Boigu's wetland ecologies support crab fishing, Erub's reef systems lend themselves to commercial finfish operations, while Kirriri's closeness to Thursday Island opens pathways for service and tourism ventures. In contrast, remote islands like Ugar face vastly different conditions with no airstrip and limited maritime access.

These differences matter. While previous regional strategies made essential contributions, a more granular and island-specific approach is now required. This project does not dismiss past efforts but builds upon them, adding depth, lived experience and local voices to support the work of government and regional partners who have long been committed to the region's progress.

Understanding the Socio-Economic Reality

The Torres Strait region faces significant and persistent socio-economic challenges. Life expectancy across the islands is 14 years below the national average. Youth make up a high proportion of the population, yet access to training, employment and career pathways remains limited. Many communities rely heavily on social housing and home ownership is near zero in several Divisions.

Geographic isolation drives up costs for freight, fuel and goods, while inconsistent transport and digital infrastructure constrain market access and business growth. On some islands, labour force participation falls well below national averages. Compounding this are complex land tenure arrangements, which make it difficult for aspiring local entrepreneurs to secure land for business activity or infrastructure development.

Despite these challenges, the Torres Strait is a region of strength, resilience and potential. Community knowledge systems, local governance capability and cultural cohesion provide an invaluable foundation for inclusive, place-based economic development. The time is right to transition from reactive service delivery to proactive economic empowerment.

What Communities Told Us

Community engagement revealed strong aspirations for locally controlled, sustainable and culturally aligned economic growth. Key findings from the region-wide survey and on-island sessions included:

- ✓ A desire for greater autonomy, with recurring themes of "Ailan-owned," "self-sufficient," and "supported" economies.
- ✓ Priority industries identified were fisheries, construction, land and sea management, and transport.
- ✓ Tourism is cautiously welcomed, communities support it where it respects culture, delivers local jobs and protects the environment.
- ✓ 90% of respondents believe there are not enough local jobs.
- ✓ Barriers to business include land tenure complexity, start-up costs, limited access to training and restricted freight/logistics.

+ Importantly, these insights reflect not just challenges, but also opportunities. The region's young population, strong kinship systems and cultural pride form the backbone of a resilient and capable economy, one that, if supported correctly, can thrive on its own terms.

Approach & Methodology

This project prioritised cultural safety, accessibility and deep listening. Engagement was co-designed with local Councillors and guided by frameworks such as the *Malungu Yangu Wakay - The Voice from the deep* (The Masig Statement), Community-Based Economic Development (CBED) model, the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, and TSIRC's own Ailan Way of "Look, Listen and Adapt.

Each island's economic reality was explored in its specific context. Economic Dashboards were developed for every Division, pairing survey data, lived experience and infrastructure capacity to provide a practical decision-making tool. Engagement with government agencies, Native Title bodies, Traditional Owners, businesses and NGOs ensured the process was regionally informed and collaborative.

Where To From Here

Phase 1 concludes with a clear message: communities across the Torres Strait are ready to lead. What they seek is support that enables, not dictates, their economic future. The next step, Phase 2, will involve co-designing a 10-year Economic Development Action Plan. This will:

- » Translate community aspirations into actionable strategies.
- » Define priority investments, training needs and enabling infrastructure.
- » Align with regional, state and national development frameworks.
- » Build new and strengthen existing partnerships with government, industry and philanthropy.

Conclusion

 This is more than a report. It is a platform for change. With Phase 1 now complete, TSIRC and its partners are uniquely positioned to lead a new generation of economic outcomes for the Torres Strait - outcomes that are place-based, people-powered and culturally strong.

The momentum is here. The challenge - and opportunity - is to move forward with a shared commitment to local leadership, long-term investment and sustainable transformation.

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Funding Acknowledgement

This project has been made possible through the financial support of the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA). Without TSRA's investment and commitment, this important work would not have been possible. Their support has been instrumental in enabling the project's delivery and in advancing outcomes of value to the Torres Strait region.

Image Acknowledgement

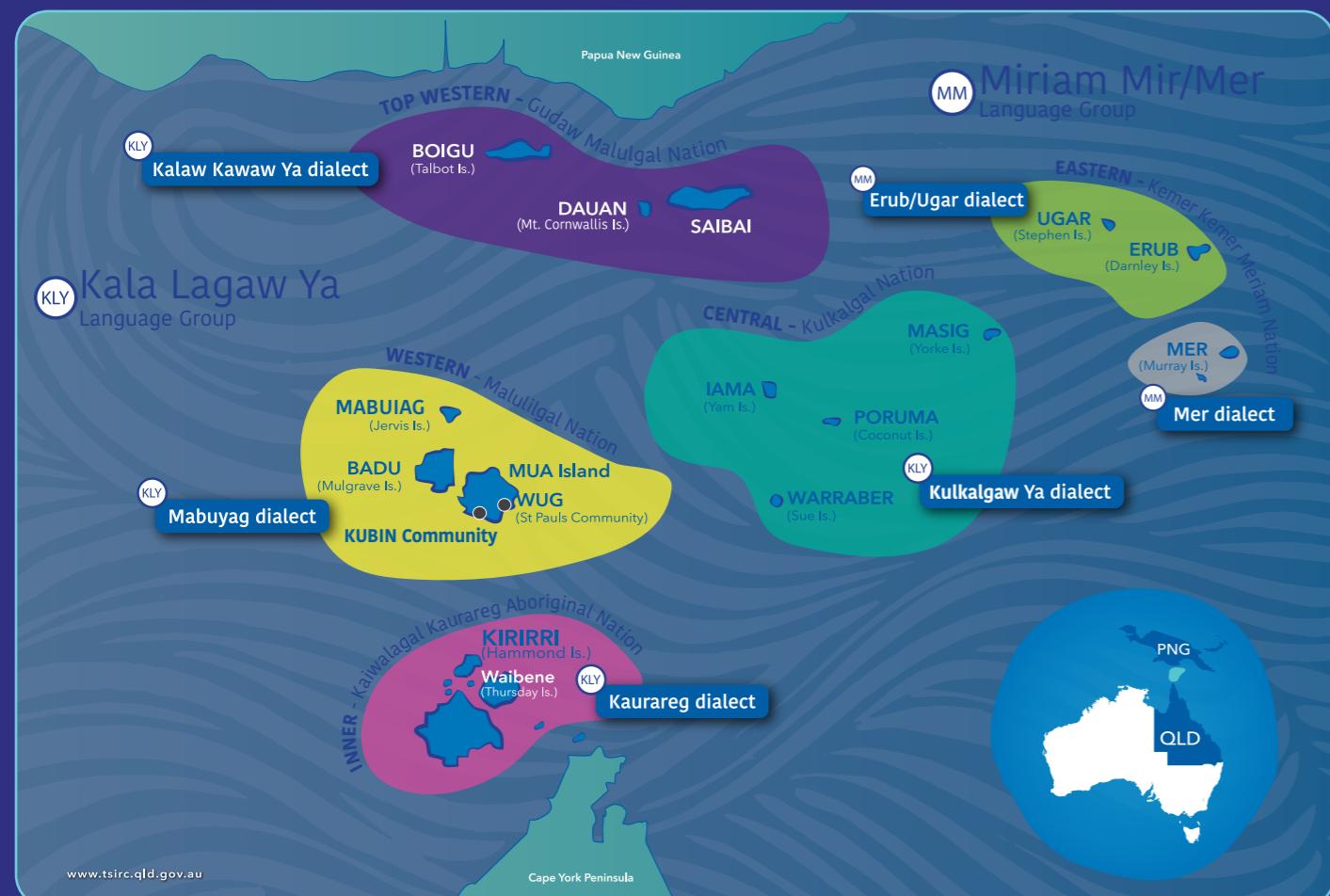
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Distinct Islands, Distinct Economies

Why Place-Based Assessment is a Non-Negotiable...

The Torres Strait is a region of profound diversity - geographically, economically and culturally. Its 15 communities span 14 inhabited islands, ranging from low-lying mangrove wetlands and alluvial plains to coral cays, volcanic outcrops, and granite mountain-top islands. Some islands are less than a kilometre from regional centres, while others are over 200 kilometres from the nearest commercial hub or airstrip. The physical differences shape distinct ecosystems, infrastructure realities and resource availability, in turn driving unique economic interests and pathways.

Previous regional strategies have made the critical mistake of treating the Torres Strait as a single, homogenous unit. This top-down, generalised approach has repeatedly failed to capture the nuance, challenges and strengths of individual communities. As a result, policies and investments have often fallen short, reinforcing dependency rather than fostering self-determined economic strength.



Introduction & Background

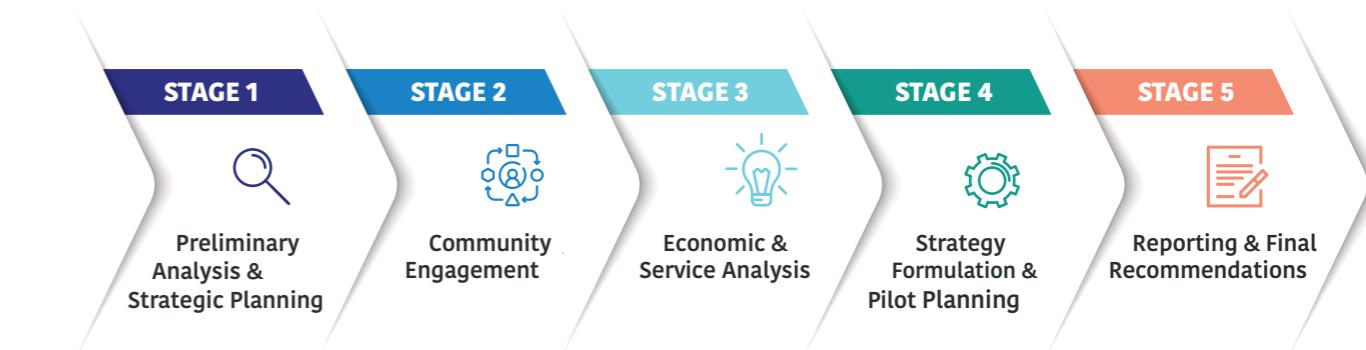


1.1. Purpose Of Phase 1 & This Report

The Torres Strait Island Regional Council (TSIRC) has undertaken a first-of-its-kind region-wide detailed community engagement process focused on economic development. This foundational phase aimed to listen deeply to each of the 15 Island Divisions, capturing local aspirations, challenges and ideas for future growth.

Through place-based, inclusive engagement with community, business, government, and non-government stakeholders, TSIRC created safe and respectful spaces on every island, ensuring that all voices could be heard. This engagement forms the basis for a clear and community-led framework for future economic development in the Torres Strait.

The purpose of this report is to document those findings, providing an evidence-based, locally driven view of economic development opportunities across the region, but from the specific perspective of each island. It presents both the unique positions of each island and the shared regional themes, outlining early strategic directions informed directly by community input.



1.2. About TSIRC Maiem | Sew Ngapa! (Welcome)

The Torres Strait Island Regional Council (TSIRC) is the largest of three local councils in the Torres Strait and Northern Cape York Peninsula Area, representing the outer islands of this complex region. This area, distinct from the Torres Shire Council (TSC) and the Northern Peninsula Area Council (NPAC). TSIRC, covering 42,000 square kilometres of water (an area roughly 60% the size of Tasmania¹), contains a relatively small population of just over 4000 people² spread across 15 distinct island communities or divisions³.

The TSIRC oversees arguably one of Australia's most complex Local Government Areas and is the only local government in Australia that directly borders another country - Saibai Island and Boigu Island in the Top Western Cluster are only 4 and 6 kilometres⁴, respectively, from the Papuan New Guinea Mainland. They are the only Local Government that manages a complex and long-standing treaty process, which involves the movement of specific Torres Strait Island and Papuan village groups outside of contemporary Border Control processes.

A significant shift occurred in 2008 with the amalgamation of individual island councils into the Torres Strait Island Regional Council (TSIRC). While this move made sense from a financial and administrative perspective, it did impact individual islands' control over their destiny. Local communities, which had

previously made decisions independently, now operated under a larger regional governance structure.

Since the amalgamation, the TSIRC has demonstrated leadership across the region. Managing an intricate network of services - from water, waste and sewerage - the council has fought for decades to secure equality in these areas for all island residents. TSIRC's consolidated structure has allowed it to leverage resources more effectively, resulting in significant progress in addressing the needs of these scattered and isolated communities. While some local control was lost, the unified council has been able to address broad issues and provide essential services that may have been more difficult for individual councils to achieve on their own.

While TSIRC's primary focus remains on traditional council services, such as roads, water and waste. Its mandate extends to social, economic and cultural development to enhance the region's liveability and sustainability. In 2024, TSIRC advanced a bold economic vision for the Torres Strait - one that strengthens local autonomy, supports self-determination and enables communities to lead their futures. Central to this is the ongoing creation of a place-based, multifaceted economic development strategy that aligns with cultural values, promotes local control over resources, and invests in long-term capacity across the region.

¹ TSIRC's official website lists a service area of 42000km². Geoscience Australia lists the Tasmania land mass at 68,401km².

² 2021 Census Data - Australian Bureau of Statistics

³ TSIRC governs 15 communities located across 14 inhabited islands. Within council operations, these are referred to as 'Divisions', with the terms 'division', 'community', and 'island' used interchangeably throughout this report.

⁴ TSIRC official website lists Saibai at 4km and Boigu at 6km from the PNG mainland.

Economic Snapshot Of The Torres Strait Region

1.3



The Torres Strait region is home to a vibrant and resilient population with a rich cultural heritage, deep ancestral ties to land and sea, and a unique geostrategic position within Australia's national landscape. However, the region continues to face longstanding structural challenges that limit economic opportunities and constrain growth.

Unlike consolidated landmass regions, the Torres Strait comprises scattered, remote islands that are often accessible only by helicopter or vessel. This geographic fragmentation contributes to unreliable transport networks, restricted mobility and higher costs of living and doing business. The lack of integrated infrastructure directly affects access to healthcare, education, and markets – all of which are essential enablers of economic development. Bulk freight is delivered via barge services, while the movement of people is predominantly supported by fixed wing and rotary aircraft. In addition, there is a significant level of informal and personal mobility among community members, who frequently travel between islands using private vessels ranging from 4 to 6 metres, commonly referred to as “dinghies.” These locally operated boats remain a vital and culturally embedded form of inter-island transport, supporting both economic and social activity.

Adding to these challenges is the region's distance from major service centres such as Cairns, which is over 800 km away. This remoteness further isolates the Torres Strait from national infrastructure networks and institutional systems, reinforcing disadvantage and limiting access to resources commonly available to mainland Australians. Islanders have endured the impacts of underinvestment, systemic racism⁵ and structural neglect – conditions that have compounded over generations.

⁵ Dismantling systemic racism – perspectives from First Nations peoples'. Australian Human Rights Commission.

⁶ Northern Australia Action Plan 2024–2029. Published by the Australian Government.

1.4. Literature Review

This literature review provides base for understanding the economic development context of the Torres Strait. Drawing on over 20 regional, national and international documents, the review highlights a region shaped by strategic geography, rich marine resources and an enduring cultural identity. Foundational studies such as the Cummings Economic Study and TSRA's Development Plan offer insights into long-standing opportunities and barriers, while more recent frameworks including the Masig Statement and REIS signal a shift toward community-led governance and place-based economic priorities.

National frameworks, such as Our North, Our Future and APEC's regional development papers, connect the Torres Strait to broader economic agendas. Meanwhile, international case studies validate the importance of resilient infrastructure and culturally anchored development in island contexts.

A SWOT analysis identifies four key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that underscore the region's complex development landscape. Together, these findings present a well-rounded view of current conditions, aspirational models and structural constraints.

This body of literature directly informs the early stages of this report, shaping the strategic context, guiding the engagement framework and grounding infrastructure assessments in both lived experience and proven research. It ensures that the TSIRC Economic Development Strategy is built on substantial evidence, clear priorities and regional empowerment.

⁷ Australian Government's 2023 Strategic Assessment from Dept. Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

 The Literature Review is attached at **Appendix 1** to this document.



Image (above): The literature review comprises information from numerous local, state, national and international documents of varying relevance.





Malungu Yangu Wakay The Voice from the deep (The Masig Statement)



The Malungu Yangu Wakay - The Voice from the deep (The Masig Statement), issued on 23 August 2022 at Masig (Yorke) Island, is a landmark expression of Torres Strait Islander self-determination. It marked a shift in development thinking—away from externally imposed frameworks and toward community-led governance, cultural authority and place-based priorities.

The Malungu Yangu Wakay - The Voice from the deep (The Masig Statement) served as a guiding reference, reinforcing Torres Strait Islander calls for self-determination and regional autonomy to freely pursue economic, social and cultural development in relation to land and sea country, in so doing, preserving their distinctive and diverse spiritual, material and economic relationship with the lands, waters and other resources with which we have a connection under Ailan Kastom and Aboriginal tradition. By embedding the Statement's principles, Phase 1 ensured that economic development planning was not only community-led and place-based but also aligned with cultural rights, environmental stewardship and intergenerational responsibility.

 link to the Masig Statement:
[Click here](#)



Project Activities

The Torres Strait Island Regional Council has driven the Phase 1 aspects of this strategy through a detailed engagement process. This process has been rooted in first listening to the challenges, understanding the background and testing future options and possibilities where necessary.



2.1. Background

The socio-economic landscape of the Torres Strait is complex, characterised by diverse cultures and significant challenges, including poverty, unemployment and inequality. To address these issues, the Torres Strait Island Regional Council (TSIRC) prioritised economic development to improve the liveability and sustainability of its communities. An Economic Growth Advisory Committee guided the Council in delivering outcomes aligned with its Corporate Plan.

TSIRC had identified a critical lack of baseline data and a limited understanding of the unique economic development needs and aspirations at the community level. This gap had constrained the Council's ability to implement an informed, coordinated and community-driven approach. As a response, the development of a long-term (10-year) Community-Based Economic Development (CBED) Action Plan was proposed. Phase 1 of the project was initiated to build a foundational, community-centric evidence base to guide this plan.

2.2. Engagement Methodology

Phase 1 focused on engaging communities, businesses, government and non-government organisations across all 15 TSIRC island communities to identify local enablers and opportunities for economic development. Each engagement session was co-designed in collaboration with the relevant Division Councillor to ensure cultural relevance and local leadership. The approach was explicitly place-based, recognising that each island has distinct infrastructure, geographic challenges, economic potential and cultural identity.

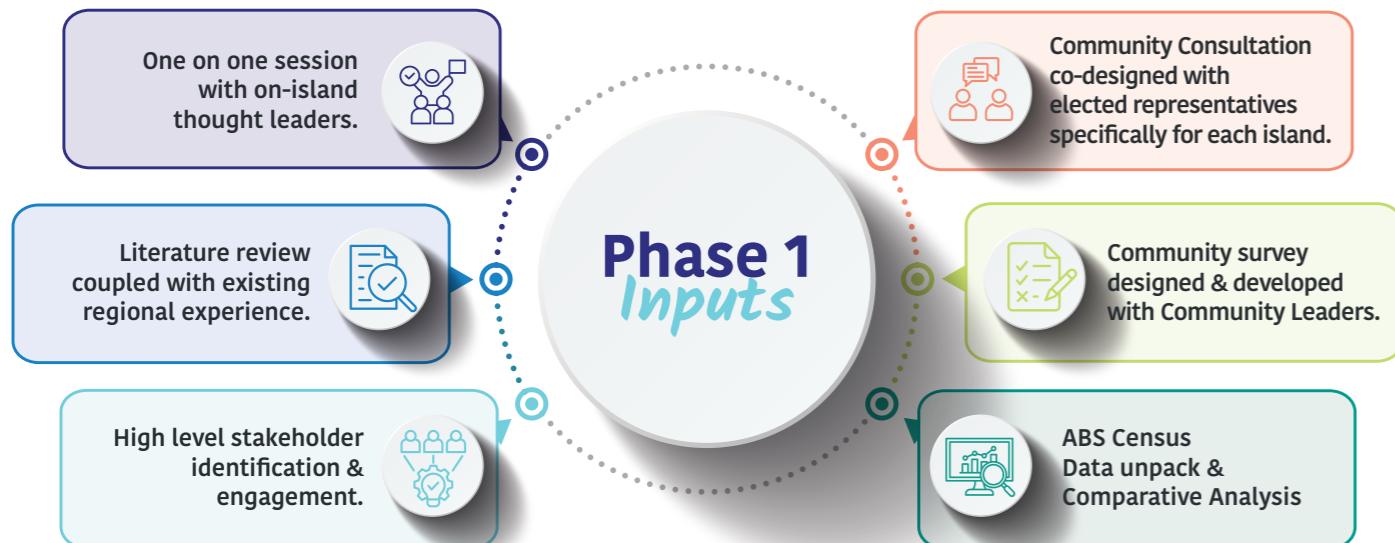
Before the on-island engagement began, a detailed pre-departure analysis was conducted using the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data. Key socio-economic indicators for each island, such as employment, income, education, housing, and population movement, were assessed against regional, Queensland, and national averages. This helped identify levels of disadvantage and inform more targeted, context-aware discussions during consultation.

The project employed a combination of place-based, strengths-based, and community-driven methodologies, drawing on proven international frameworks. Central to this was the 'Ailan Way' of 'Look, Listen and Adapt' (Killick, 2024), which

emphasised deep listening, cross-generational dialogue and locally informed adaptation. This was complemented by the Community-Based Economic Development (CBED) model, which prioritised livelihoods, local control, diversity, inclusion and shared learning. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (Chambers and Conway, 1992) provided a holistic lens through which human, social, cultural, natural, financial and physical capitals were considered. Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) tools were used to position local people as experts in their own lives - enabling them to analyse priorities and shape realistic solutions.

To strengthen inclusivity, a community survey was developed in close partnership with the all-Indigenous, island-based Project Control Group. It enabled participation from those who were unable or uncomfortable speaking in public forums and served as a private, culturally safe tool for honest input.

Together, these approaches ensured that Phase 1 was community-led, culturally grounded and informed by both data and lived experience - laying a strong foundation for TSIRC's long-term Community-Based Economic Development Strategy.



2.3. Preliminary Stakeholder Engagement Summary

Between 24 February and 6 May 2025, a total of 50 stakeholder meetings were held across 25 organisations in Cairns, Thursday Island, and via video conference from other locations. These meetings involved representatives from government (local, state and Commonwealth), traditional owner bodies, health, education, tourism, fisheries, transport and utilities.

This early engagement phase helped shape the direction and focus of on-island consultations. It provided valuable insights into regional economic conditions, infrastructure limitations and industry priorities, supporting the project's commitment to place-based planning. These conversations laid the groundwork for a deeper understanding of key sectors and ensured the Phase 2 community engagement process was targeted, informed and grounded in the regional context.

2.3. Preliminary Stakeholder Engagement Summary (continued)

Below is a summary of the stakeholder organisations or individuals engaged:

- 1 # Meriba Ged Ngalpum Mab
- 2 # Gur A Baradharaw Kod Torres Strait Sea & Land Council (GBK)
- 3 # Torres & Cape Hospital & Health Service
- 4 # Torres Health
- 5 # Tagai State College
- 6 # Torres Strait Kaziw Meta
- 7 # Northern Australia Infrastructure Fund
- 8 # Seawift
- 9 # Espanq Ventures
- 10 # QLD Dept. Tourism
- 11 # QLD Dept. Employment, Small Business & Training
- 12 # QLD Dept. Women, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Partnerships & Multiculturalism
- 13 # Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing & Water
- 14 # Regional Development Australia - Tropical North
- 15 # James Cook University
- 16 # Tropical Tourism North Queensland
- 17 # Torres Strait Island Regional Council – Mayor
- 18 # Torres Strait Island Regional Council – Chief Executive Officer
- 19 # Torres Strait Island Regional Council – Executive branch
- 20 # Torres Strait Island Regional Council – Other key stakeholders
- 21 # CSIRO
- 22 # Torres Strait Regional Authority – Economic Development Program
- 23 # Torres Strait Regional Authority - Strategic Policy Program
- 24 # Torres Strait Regional Authority - Fisheries Program
- 25 # Ergon Energy

2.4. Pre-departure Community Communications

During Phase 1, Emver Partner's Graphic Design team partnered with TSIRC's Media and Communications team to work together on targeted steps aimed at informing each community about the upcoming engagement and survey activities. Messaging was delivered through Facebook and WhatsApp, supported by short-form, island-specific content to ensure accessibility.

Councillors and Divisional Managers played a key role in sharing information locally. Posters were also distributed by TSIRC staff on each of the islands. These efforts ensured communities were aware and prepared, supporting strong participation across all 15 Divisions.

Below are some images of this process:



2.4. Pre-departure Community Communications (continued)



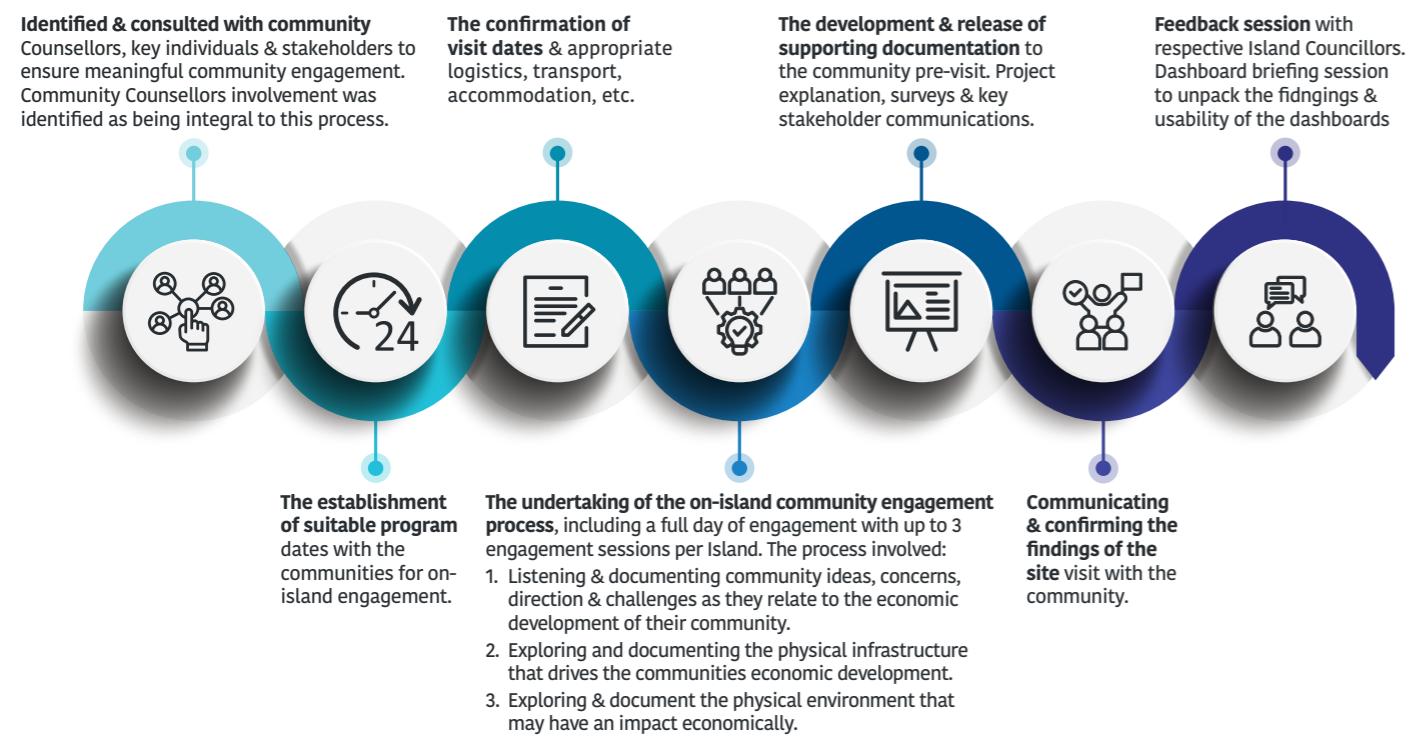
2.5. Community Engagement Process

The community engagement process involved structured engagements across the 15 island communities, integrating the community's voice in shaping their economic future.

Each community was engaged by undertaking a full day of on-island engagement, hosting morning, afternoon and/or evening sessions to maximise community participation. Key one-on-one business and stakeholder meetings were also conducted, as necessary or requested, with high-value stakeholders and identified economic development leaders to drive understanding further.

To assist in obtaining relevant data and to ensure a greater reach of voices, the communities were targeted with an economic development-driven survey (see Appendix 2). Comprising seven key sections, the survey provided community insights on their vision of the direction of economic growth within the region.

Community engagement followed the following overarching process:



“ We want to own our resources, not give our resources.

Warraber Island |
Community Member



2.6. Staging Methodology

Phase 1 employed a refined methodology inspired by best practices from previous projects tailored to the specific needs of the Economic Development Strategy in the Torres Strait. The approach emphasised extensive community engagement, thorough service analysis and meticulous planning, ensuring a robust, inclusive and sustainable strategy. The methodology of the project comprised the following key phases:

Table 1- Project Staging Summary

Stage	Description	Need & Rationale
Stage 1	Preliminary Analysis & Strategic Planning	This initial phase laid the foundation for the project by reviewing existing literature, unpacking ABS Census data, assessing regional, state and national economic baselines, engaging a significant number of key stakeholders and identifying early strategic considerations. It ensured that all subsequent stages were guided by evidence, aligned to TSIRC's core objectives and grounded in a realistic understanding of existing conditions and gaps.
Stage 2	Community Engagement	The core and longest phase of the project, Stage 2, involved on-island engagement with all 15 communities, infrastructure investigations, cultural consultations and the delivery of surveys. This stage was essential to ensure every island's economic reality, infrastructure needs and community aspirations were captured correctly. Its length and depth reflect the project's commitment to bottom-up, place-based planning. Without this stage, no island-specific strategy would be credible or community-supported.
Stage 3	Economic & Service Analysis	This phase analysed local and regional economic conditions, service delivery models and identified barriers to economic participation. It assessed supply chain gaps, employment pathways and sector opportunities based on evidence gathered in Stage 2. The analysis helped frame realistic strategic directions and future potential investment options aligned with community capacity and ambition.
Stage 4	Strategy Formulation & Pilot Planning	Rather than producing pilot recommendations, this stage focused on identifying recurring themes, shared barriers and enabling conditions across islands. It analysed potential pathways for pilot activity in future phases and helped shape the structure of collective recommendations by grouping island priorities where alignment existed.
Stage 5	Reporting & Final Recommendations	The final stage brings together all findings into a clear and actionable report. It includes tailored economic dashboards for each Division and a roadmap for implementing a 10-year Community-Based Sustainable Economic Development (CBSED) Plan, backed by partnerships and investment pathways.

2.7. Final Program (as delivered)

The program below outlines the finalised timeline, key milestones and deliverables for each stage of the Phase 1.

Wk.	Date	Sg.	Activities, Deliverables & Tasks			
1	3-Feb-25	1	Literature Review & Resource planning	Program Update, Stakeholder Identification	Project Set-up	Kick-off Meeting
2	10-Feb-25				Community Survey Work	Contract Execution
3	17-Feb-25					
4	24-Feb-25				Project Launch	Exec. Client Meeting
5	3-Mar-25	2	Client Review Period - Survey Review			
6	10-Mar-25		Stakeholder/ Industry Leader meetings	Info. Sharing Session		
7	17-Mar-25			Project Plan Approval		
8	24-Mar-25			Project Info Release	Meetings with Councils, PBC, GBK & TSRA	PSG#1
9	31-Mar-25			Survey Release		
10	7-Apr-25		Client Review Period - Intro & Background		Island Visit notice	Easter & School Holidays
11	14-Apr-25		Pre- Arrival meetings and island planning			
12	21-Apr-25		Consult Development Period			Island Visit
13	28-Apr-25		Hammond	Saibai	Boigu	Island Visit
14	5-May-25		Poruma	Masig	Iama	PSG#2
15	12-May-25		Consult Development Period		Extra Community	Follow-up sessions
16	19-May-25		Client Review Period - 1st phase of Islands			Island Visit
17	26-May-25		Ugar	Erub	Mer	Eco-Service Analysis
18	2-Jun-25	3 & 4	Badu	Mabuiag	Moa (St Pauls)	Moa (Kubin)
19	9-Jun-25				Warraber	PSG#3
20	16-Jun-25		Consult Development Period			Thank you email/ socials
21	23-Jun-25		Client Review Period - 2nd phase of Islands			Extra Community
22	30-Jun-25		Strategy Formulation & Pilot Planning - Consult Development Period			Follow-up sessions
23	7-Jul-25					Coming of the Light
24	14-Jul-25		Common Theme Analysis		PSG#4	School Holidays
25	21-Jul-25		Regional SWOT Analysis			
26	28-Jul-25	5	Dashboard Release To Respective Island			Final PSG#5
27	4-Aug-25		Delivery Of All Draft Documents - Dashboards, Regional Analysis & Swot Data			
28	11-Aug-25		Client Review			
29	18-Aug-25		Delivery Of All Final Documents			
			Client Review Period		Final Acceptance Meeting with EDGC	PROJECT GATE

References	Community Consultation Task	Consultant Development Period
	Meetings/Workshops	School/Public Holidays
	Deliverable	Project Marketing & Social Media Announcement
	Client Review Period	



3.1. Socio-Economic Overview of the Torres Strait Region

SECTION



Geographic Isolation

The Torres Strait region presents a complex socio-economic profile that differs significantly from those of Queensland and the national averages. Across most indicators, the region experiences heightened disadvantage driven by geographic isolation, reduced access to services, and economic structural challenges.

ANALYSIS

Distances to both mainland Australia and Papua New Guinea vary significantly across the 15 island communities, ranging from 30 km (Hammond) to 180 km (Erub and Mer) from the mainland. Critically, most TSIRC communities are located closer to Papua New Guinea than to mainland Australia, meaning that most residents live nearer to another country's coast than their own.



Service Access

The physical isolation of TSIRC communities translates directly into limited and delayed access to essential services. Transport, freight, telecommunications, emergency response and infrastructure delivery are all constrained by distance, weather and cost. Islands rely on a mix of barge, light aircraft and charter services - many of which are infrequent and weather-dependent. Service gaps are especially pronounced in digital connectivity, fuel security, housing supply and access to skilled labour. Supply chains are long and fragile, resulting in inflated costs for goods, delays in project delivery, and challenges in maintaining reliable service standards.



Hospital Access

TSIRC communities are, on average, 112 km from hospital care, compared to 15 km in Queensland and 10km in Australia. Mer, Erub and Boigu face the longest distance up to 20 times further than the Australian average. Compounding this issue is the island's geography, which necessitates medical evacuations as the only option for urgent care. Limited transportation and visiting services exacerbate the region's vulnerability to health inequities.



Life Expectancy

Life expectancy across the region averages 69 years, 14 years below the national average. This reflects deep structural barriers: limited access, delayed treatment, chronic illness and underinvestment in long-term care. Health inequality is not incidental here - it's embedded in geography and systems that have failed to adapt.



Demographics & Population

TSIRC communities have a significantly younger population, with a median age of 27 compared to 38 nationally. Islands like Dauan and Mabuiag have an average age of just 21 years, reflecting high birth rates. This youth-heavy demographic presents urgent needs for education, training and employment, but also represents a strategic opportunity. If supported properly, this emerging generation could help drive future economic growth, innovation and leadership across the Torres Strait region.



Employment & Income

The average labour force participation rate across TSIRC is 59%, well below national (66.9%) and Queensland (64.7%) benchmarks. Some communities, like Badu (42.2%) and Boigu (44.4%), experience even lower rates. Median household income is \$1,000/week - significantly less than the national average of \$1,746. Dauan (\$739) and Kubin (\$725) are among the lowest, reflecting limited employment options, underdeveloped markets and restricted access to diversified income streams.



Housing & Overcrowding

Across TSIRC, households average 3.1 persons per dwelling, higher than the national average of 2.6, indicating overcrowding in some areas. Home ownership is extremely low - several islands report 0% fully owned dwellings. Meanwhile, rental occupancy rates exceed 70% on many islands, with Dauan and Boigu reaching over 90%. This highlights significant housing stress and a heavy dependence on social or government-provided housing across the region.

3.2. Key Economic Sectors & Trends⁸

The Torres Strait economy is shaped by its geographic isolation, cultural heritage, natural resources and reliance on both traditional industries and government support. While historical data once dominated regional analysis, recent figures show clear sectoral trends and economic shifts. Below is an overview of the region's primary sectors based on a preliminary assessment of public documents.

3.2.1. Fisheries



Fisheries are widely regarded as the economic backbone of the Torres Strait, particularly in commercial terms. However, when measured by financial output, it is smaller than several other sectors. Despite this, the industry remains underdeveloped across multiple sub-sectors, with a significant portion of the resource wealth being shared with non-Indigenous and non-local fishers. Additionally, Indigenous control over key value chain components, such as wholesaling and export, is limited.

According to the 2022-23 Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) data⁹, the total estimated value of Torres Strait fisheries is approximately A\$45 million, broken down as follows:

	Prawn fishery:	~A\$12 million
	Tropical Rock Lobster (TRL):	~A\$11 million
	Finfish (e.g. coral trout, Spanish mackerel):	~A\$8 million
	Sea cucumber (beche-de-mer):	~A\$1.5 million

These figures reflect a stabilising industry with strong community participation, but also a sector constrained by quota allocations, access, weather dependency and infrastructure gaps.

3.2.2. Public Sector¹⁰

The public service remains a cornerstone of the Torres Strait economy, providing stable employment across governance, health, education and infrastructure. It supports hundreds of local jobs, many of which are held by Torres Strait Islander people, contributing to both service delivery and regional economic stability.

Preliminary analysis of publicly available data suggests that the public sector is likely the single most significant economic driver in the region, exceeding other industries in both employment volume and financial consistency. Key institutions, such as TSRA, TSIRC, Tagai State College, Torres Shire Council, and the Northern sector of Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service, collectively provide year-round employment, often serving as the sole formal employer in smaller island communities.

These organisations not only deliver essential services but also drive demand for housing, logistics and local procurement. The table below provides an indicative snapshot of each entity's employment footprint and its broader economic role:

Organisation	Estimated Staff Employed	Employment Impact	Est. Staff Cost
TSRA (Torres Strait Regional Authority)	153 (84% indigenous, 93% in Torres Strait)	High proportion of Indigenous employment (~90%), significant Commonwealth employer, year-round stability.	\$19.98m
TSIRC (Torres Strait Island Regional Council)	Community Engagement 343 (78% live in the community, 85% indigenous)	Largest employer across the outer islands. Key in infrastructure & community delivery.	\$28.93m
Torres Shire Council	109	Supports key services on Thursday & Horn Islands, local governance and tourism functions.	\$10.79m
Tagai State College	332 (156 teaching, 176 non-teaching, 145 ATSI)	Primary education provider across the islands, with high Indigenous employment and youth development rates.	(Undisclosed)
Torres & Cape Hospital & Health Service – Northern Sector	(Undisclosed)	Delivers health services across remote islands, key to public health access and clinical support.	(Undisclosed)

While more detailed cost data is expected to be unpacked in future stages of this project, the scale and reach of these institutions already highlight the central role of the public service in supporting not only jobs, but community resilience, inter-island service continuity and long-term development pathways.

⁸ Note: Phase 1 focuses primarily on community engagement and has not been tasked with conducting a detailed economic sector and trend analysis. A more comprehensive unpacking of sector performance, investment flows and regional economic modelling is planned for future Phases. However, a preliminary overview has been included to provide essential context and support a broader understanding of the Torres Strait's economic landscape.

⁹ The figures reported (~A\$45 million total value) are aggregated from the most recent AFMA monitoring data for the Torres Strait Protected Zone fisheries for the 2022-23 period. Available through the AFMA CatchWatch data platform.

¹⁰ Sources for information contained in the table of this section are from the following respective sources: (a) TSRA Annual Report 23-24, (b) TSIRC Annual Report 23-24, (c) Torres Shire Council Annual Report 23-24, (d) Tagai State College Annual Report 23-24 & TCHHS Annual Report 23-24.

¹¹ Unpacking TCHHS's employment numbers and financial summaries requires further details due to their Annual report being across both the Cape York and Torres Strait as well as their complex workforce employment relationship with Queensland Health.



3.2.3. Land & Sea Management

Land and sea management is a vital sector in the Torres Strait, supporting cultural stewardship, environmental protection and local employment. The TSRA's Land and Sea Management Unit (LSMU) coordinates one of Australia's most remote Indigenous ranger programs, employing over 60 local rangers across multiple islands.

Rangers play frontline roles in biodiversity monitoring, reef and seagrass health assessments, biosecurity surveillance, invasive species control and the protection of cultural sites. Their work blends traditional knowledge with environmental science, contributing to national conservation goals while reinforcing Indigenous governance and leadership. Rangers collaborate closely with NAQS, government agencies and Traditional Owners to manage and protect Country.

Beyond conservation, the program supports economic development by providing accredited training, stable employment and meaningful work tied to community and culture. It was widely supported by Community throughout the consultation stage and is a strong example of how culturally grounded environmental management can achieve both ecological and economic outcomes in remote island contexts.



3.2.4. Building & Construction

Construction and infrastructure investment represent one of the most financially significant sectors in the Torres Strait, both in terms of capital inflow and long-term community impact. For example, since 1998, the TSRA's Major Infrastructure Programme (MIP) has delivered over \$300 million in essential services across the broader Torres Strait region. Programmes like this are not only critical for health and liveability but also act as enablers of future economic activity.

Recent Commonwealth Government announcements, totalling A\$77.4 million for seawalls and essential environmental health infrastructure between 2025 and 2030, highlight the ongoing role of infrastructure as a driver of resilience and climate adaptation. While this summary does not delve into the specific split between State and Commonwealth funding, the scale of investment underscores the high reliance on public capital for regional development.

However, despite this investment, widespread concerns were raised throughout the Phase 1 community engagement regarding limited local participation in the construction and building sector. Many community members observed that large-scale infrastructure projects are often led by out-of-region contractors, with external workforces flown in for delivery. This perceived exclusion has raised questions about the long-term benefits of infrastructure spending and the need for greater community contracting, training and ownership.

Moving forward, construction and infrastructure development must not only deliver physical assets but also build pathways for local economic inclusion, skills development and employment. A deeper review of procurement policy, training partnerships and Indigenous-owned contractor models will be critical in later project stages to ensure this high-value sector supports sustainable, place-based outcomes.



3.2.5. Transport

Transport in the Torres Strait is a critical enabler of all social and economic activity, yet it remains one of the region's most constrained sectors. Currently, maritime freight and shipping services are dominated by a single major provider, creating a virtual monopoly over inter-island and mainland logistics. Only recently have small-scale operators and independent freight services begun to emerge - though their reach remains limited by cost, infrastructure and regulatory barriers.

Despite the region's complex geography, the need for inter-island ferry and cargo services is widely acknowledged. A viable model would require multi-role, multi-purpose vessels capable of moving people, freight and essential supplies in a cost-effective manner. Without such versatility, demand alone may not sustain commercially viable operations across all islands.

While the local population has deep seafaring knowledge, weather expertise and navigational skills, their current role in managing, owning or operating transport businesses is limited. With strategic investment, culturally tailored business training and capital support, there is clear potential for greater Indigenous ownership and participation in this essential regional industry.



3.2.6. Defence, Border & National Security

The Torres Strait is Australia's most exposed northern border, with Saibai Island lying just 4 km from Papua New Guinea. As such, the region plays a vital role in national security, border control, and biosecurity enforcement, supported by organisations such as the Australian Border Force (ABF), the Australian Defence Force (ADF), and the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy's associated workforce.

While current security operations are primarily based out of Thursday Island, Phase 1 community engagement highlighted the opportunity for greater local involvement and the decentralisation of personnel and assets to outer islands, closer to where border risks are most pronounced.

By relocating or rotating non-local workforces and support operations to outer island communities, the government can achieve dual benefits:

- » Improved border surveillance and responsiveness, and
- » Increased economic participation in some of the region's most disadvantaged communities.

Strategic remobilisation of this workforce would strengthen sovereignty, reduce reaction times and generate sustained local employment in housing, logistics, fuel, maintenance and infrastructure support across the outer islands.



3.2.7. Tourism, Arts & Cultural Industries

Tourism and cultural activity in the Torres Strait remain an underdeveloped but strategically significant sector. While official visitor data is not reported by any agency or department across the region, Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ) emphasises Indigenous culture and reef-based experiences as high-value visitor drivers. Though Torres Strait's direct share is small, these figures establish a performance benchmark for potential growth in small-scale, high-yield, eco-cultural visitation.

The arts and cultural industries, particularly through outer-island-based Indigenous art centres on Erub, Badu, and Moa Islands, as well as the Gab Titui Cultural Centre on Thursday Island, play a vital role in cultural preservation and community development. Cultural programmes support language revitalisation, traditional dance and art production, offering economic benefits and social cohesion across the region.

Tourism and cultural industries offer emerging opportunities for economic diversification beyond traditional sectors, such as fisheries and infrastructure. Cultural storytelling, visual arts, Indigenous tourism, and language revival resonate with global visitor trends, strengthening community identity. However, the success of these sectors hinges on improved transportation access, support for small enterprises, e-commerce pathways, and partnership development to ensure benefits are retained locally.

As a next step, detailed island-based market mapping, visitor flow analysis and enterprise capability audits will be essential to unlock scalable growth paths in cultural tourism and arts industries across the Torres Strait.

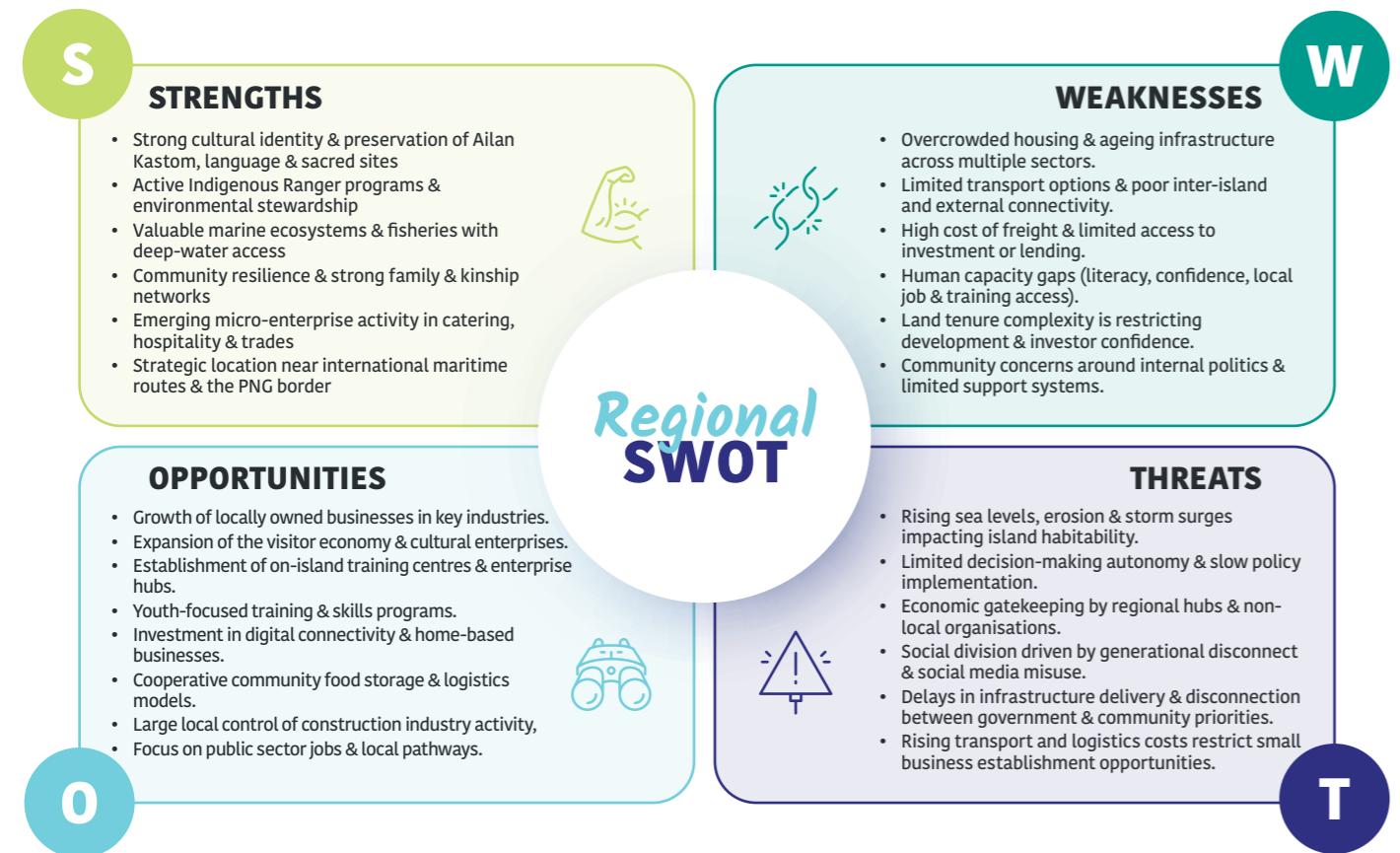


3.2.8. Other industries

Beyond the dominant sectors, several smaller industries in the Torres Strait hold untapped potential for local job creation, business growth and economic participation. Community services - including aged care, disability support and early childhood care - are in growing demand and, if locally delivered, could generate sustained employment across all islands. The rise of digital platforms and remote work also presents opportunities for online businesses, creative services, and e-commerce ventures that can overcome geographic isolation. In parallel, locally owned retail and hospitality enterprises - such as cafés, accommodation, and general stores - offer scope for cultural and community-centred economic development. Additionally, Native Title Prescribed Body Corporations (PBCs) and not-for-profit organisations already play major governance and service roles. With greater resourcing and enterprise support, these entities could expand into land management, cultural tourism, construction partnerships and community contracting - anchoring wealth locally while strengthening self-determination.

3.3. Regional Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)

This SWOT analysis provides a region-wide summary of insights drawn directly from community responses to the Economic Development Survey. The findings reflect collective island perspectives and reveal consistent patterns across the region, highlighting areas of advantage, constraint and potential. These insights will inform the development of localised strategies in later phases.



3.4. How Tenure, Housing & Planning Shape Economic Opportunity

Economic development in the TSIRC region is closely tied to land tenure, housing rights, Native Title and layered government policy, creating a slow, complex and costly environment for local businesses to navigate. During our engagement, many community members expressed that these processes were often confusing, uncertain and inconsistent.

The TSIRC Trustee Policy (adopted 22 July 2025) introduces a structured framework with defined steps and guidelines for leasing and planning decisions on Trust Land. While it is too early to determine the impact of these changes, the new approach sets out a more precise sequence of actions for applicants.

The process now includes lodging an approved Expression of Interest (EOI), securing support from the relevant Divisional Councillor and, where applicable, the Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC), undertaking community consultation in accordance with the community's agreed process, and addressing Native Title through consent or Future Act validation. Development and planning approvals, surveys and all Agreement to Lease conditions must be met before a lease is executed and registered.

Procedures vary by DOGIT community, reflecting Ailan Kastom and traditional decision-making processes, but all require a

formal Trustee resolution. In communities where land is under Torres Strait Islander Freehold (e.g. Mer and Badu), the RNTBC acts as Trustee, with TSIRC limited to planning approvals.

Home-based businesses are permitted under specific conditions, including payment of commercial utility rates and restrictions on structural changes. The growth of informal economies reflects both community innovation and barriers to formalisation.

Commercial leasing follows a set rent methodology and standard terms that cover rent, rates, insurance, maintenance, and compliance with laws. Home ownership processes are outlined for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land Holding Act leases and 99-year home ownership leases, including timeframes for building dwellings, transfer rules and agreed house and land pricing.

Our engagement was completed before the revised policy was released, meaning community views reflect earlier arrangements. This section, therefore, notes the changes without concluding their future effect, recognising that the outcomes of the new approach will only become evident over time.

A Grassroots Finance Model How Mabuiag Women Built A Microcredit Program From The Ground Up.





4.1. Introduction

A region-wide survey was conducted across all 15 island communities to ensure the strategy was grounded in local knowledge and priorities. It aimed to identify economic opportunities, community aspirations, and the barriers to regional development.

The survey was offered both online and in hard copy, with local facilitators helping to ensure broad access across different languages and literacy levels. Responses were voluntary, anonymous, and collected over eight weeks.

4.2. Survey Participation

Survey participation across the Torres Strait region reached 327 completed responses, representing 79% of the targeted sample size and 7.9% of the total population. This is a strong outcome, particularly for a geographically dispersed and logically complex region like the Torres Strait. Thirteen of the fifteen island divisions achieved more than 50% of their target, with nine exceeding 75%, and six surpassing 100%.

Outstanding performances came from Ugar Island (157%), Dauan Island (137%) and Warraber, Mer and Mabuiag Islands - all hitting or exceeding 100%. While Badu and Hammond, fell below 50%, their input still added valuable insights. Overall, the response rate reflects strong community interest and engagement in shaping future economic development. It provides a credible and diverse evidence base for decision-making. This level of participation affirms the community's readiness to contribute to long-term planning and highlights the trust built through the engagement process.

Division	Pop.	Survey Target	Surveys Completed	Surveys required	% of target	% of population
Badu Island	700	70	25	45	36%	4%
Boigu Island	199	20	13	7	65%	7%
Dauan Island	131	13	18	-5	137%	14%
Erub (Darnley) Island	326	33	33	0	101%	10%
Hammond Island	261	26	12	14	46%	5%
Iama (Yam) Island	275	28	24	4	87%	9%
Kubin (Moa) Island	220	22	24	-2	109%	11%
Mabuiag Island	253	25	26	-1	103%	10%
Masig (Yorke) Island	283	28	18	10	64%	6%
Mer (Murray) Island	456	41	41	0	101%	10%
Poruma (Coconut) Island	164	16	14	2	85%	9%
Saibai Island	340	34	18	16	53%	5%
St Pauls (Moa) Island	250	25	21	4	84%	8%
Ugar (Stephen) Island	70	7	11	-4	157%	16%
Warraber (Sue) Island	287	28	29	-1	104%	10%
TOTALS	4165	415.8	327	89	79%	7.9%

References

DARK GREEN: Complete (over 100%)	ORANGE: Below Target (over 50% complete)
LIGHT GREEN: On target (75-99% complete)	LIGHT RED: Well below target (under 50%)

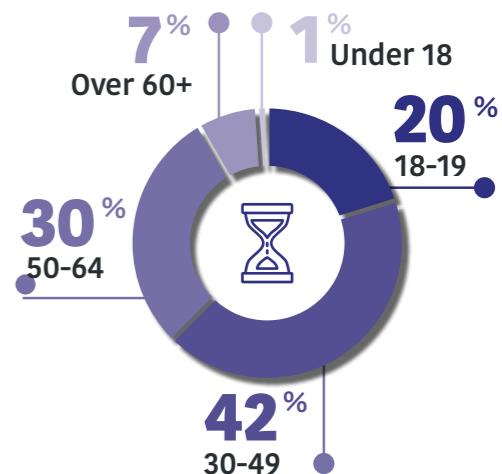
The information below combines all survey responses across all 15 Divisions for each question set.



Note: selected individual responses are provided in each Island's Dashboard in further sections of the report.

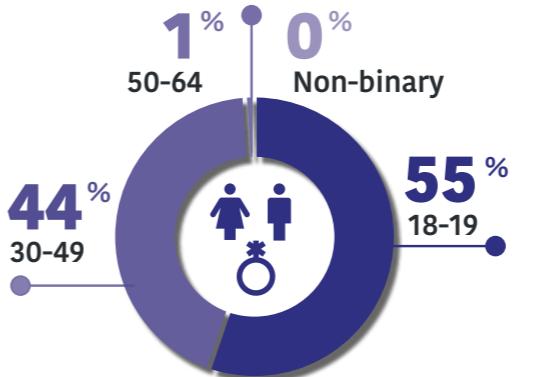
4.2.1. Age Distribution of Respondents

Most respondents were aged 30-49 (42%) and 50-64 (30%), indicating that the data strongly reflect the views of working-age adults actively involved in family, employment, and community life. Participants aged 18-29 made up 20%, while elders (65+) and youth (under 18) accounted for just 7% and 1% respectively. This distribution suggests the engagement resonated with those most engaged in the region's social and economic systems. Their perspectives are grounded in the day-to-day realities of island living. However, the relatively low response rate from elders and young people highlights a future opportunity to more actively include intergenerational voices - those with deep memory and those with emerging ambition - into the ongoing development conversation.



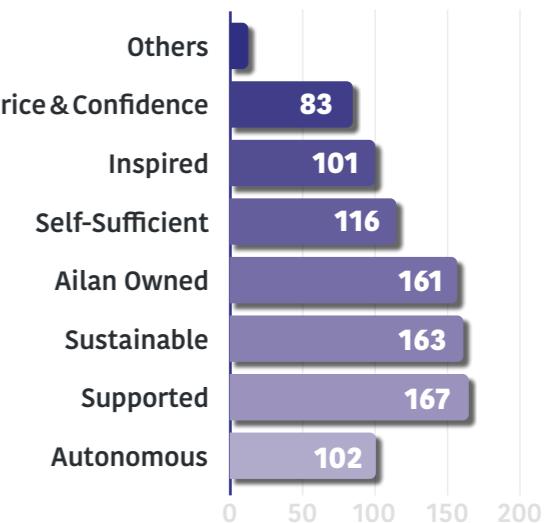
4.2.2. Gender Representation

Women made up 55% of the respondents, men 44%, and 1% preferred not to disclose their gender. No participants identified as non-binary. The high participation of women reflects their leadership in community, culture, family and informal economic life across the islands. It also brings visibility to issues often shaped by gender - such as access to training, caregiving responsibilities, and small enterprises. The lack of gender-diverse responses could indicate social discomfort or invisibility around non-binary identities in local systems. This gender profile enhances the validity of the dataset by ensuring that female voices are prominently represented in economic discussions. It also sets the foundation for future planning to be gender-aware, recognising that development outcomes are not experienced equally, and equity in participation, leadership, and access must remain a priority.

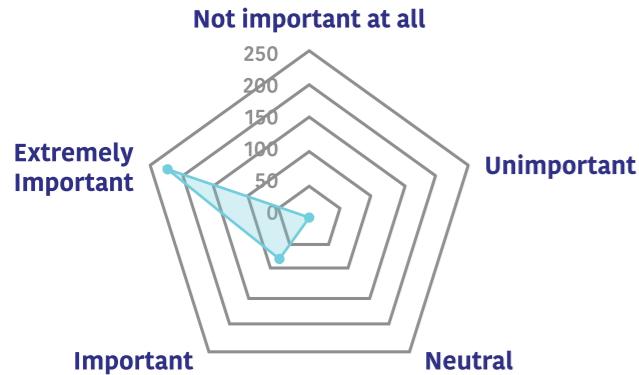


4.2.3. Community Vision for the Future

When asked to describe their economic vision, respondents overwhelmingly chose values like "Supported" (18%), "Sustainable" (18%) and "Ailan owned" (18%). Terms such as "Self-sufficient" (13%) and "Autonomous" (11%) were also popular, while emotional descriptors like "Pride and confidence" (9%) and "Inspired" (11%) were less prominent. Only 2% selected "Other," showing a high level of shared understanding. These results reflect a community focused on local control, resilience and culturally grounded growth. People are not calling for charity - they're calling for the tools to build on their strengths. The consistent prioritisation of both support and independence suggests an appetite for balanced partnerships that respect community authority while helping unlock opportunities across the Torres Strait.



Note: The total numbers in the chart represent the number of responses, as the survey allowed for up to three responses per participant; this amount is therefore higher than the total survey participant number of 327.

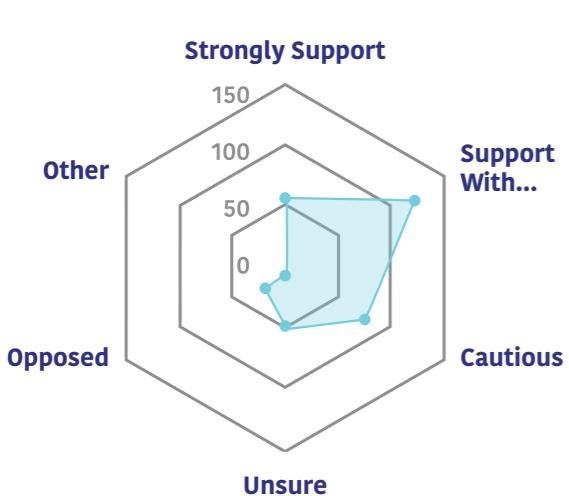
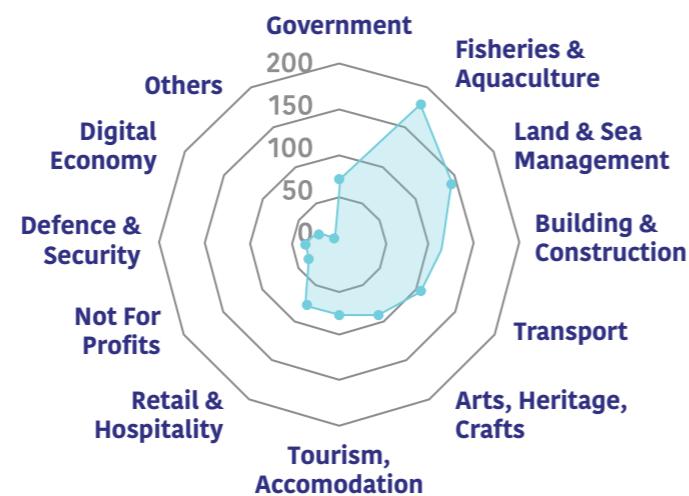


4.2.4. Importance of Ailan Kastom (Island Custom)

Ailan Kastom is central to the region's identity and development, with 73% of respondents marking it as "Extremely important" and 23% calling it "Important" - a total of 96%. Only 3% were neutral or unsure, and less than 1% deemed it unimportant. These figures confirm what many already know, cultural values, protocols, and governance are not optional add-ons to development, but its core. From leadership to land ownership and decision-making, Kastom influences how opportunities are interpreted and acted upon. This shared view sends a strong message: successful development in the Torres Strait must honour and integrate culture, or it risks being disconnected, ineffective, and ultimately rejected by the community.

4.2.5. Priority Industries for Economic Development

Fisheries (19%), land and sea management (15%), construction (12%) and transport (11%) were ranked highest, reflecting practical, place-based priorities. Tourism, arts and retail also performed well, showing interest in emerging sectors. The government, however, scored only 8%, despite being the region's largest employer. This low ranking highlights a disconnect between its scale and perceived impact. It suggests that the government is not seen as an active economic enabler, but rather as a static provider of jobs. The result indicates a lack of economic strategy within the public sector; an enormous opportunity being underutilised. People want industries that deliver purpose, not just payroll and the government need to unpack how they can be aspirational for the community to enter.



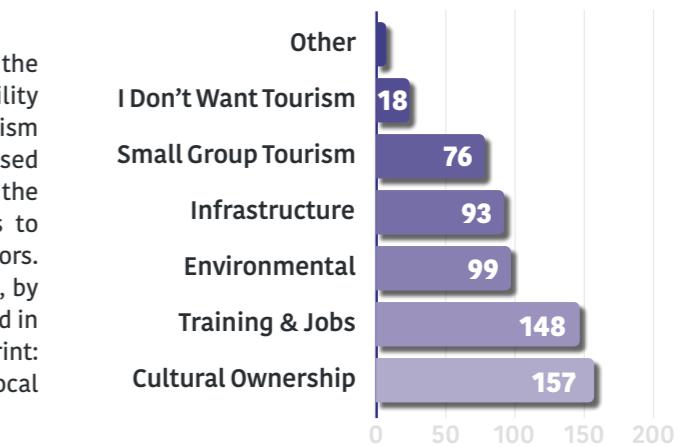
4.2.6. Community Attitudes Toward Tourism

Tourism is cautiously supported. While 37% "Support with conditions" and 19% "Strongly support," 23% were "Cautious," 14% "Unsure," and 6% "Opposed." Communities see tourism's potential but insist on control, cultural respect and environmental protection. The data reflects a lived understanding of tourism's risks and rewards. Support is conditional - built on fairness, benefit-sharing, and alignment with community values. These views support small-scale, locally led tourism models that avoid cultural harm or economic leakage. Torres Strait Islanders are not rejecting tourism; they are demanding that their values and priorities shape it. Trust, respect and self-determination remain at the heart of tourism acceptance.

4.2.7. Conditions for Tourism Growth

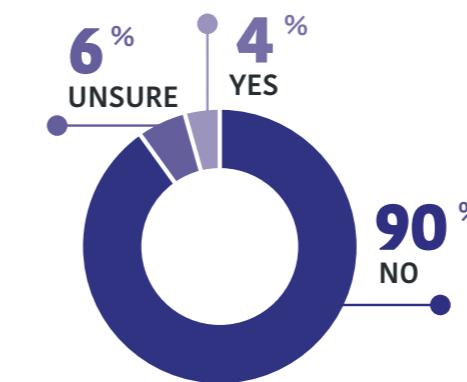
Cultural ownership (26%) and training and jobs (25%) are the leading responses, followed by environmental sustainability (17%) and infrastructure investment (16%). Small group tourism (13%) also received a favourable rating, with only 3% opposed to its growth. These results show tourism must support the community, not extract from it. People want pathways to employment and protection for the Country, not just visitors. Cultural control is crucial, as it determines what's shared, by whom, and how it's presented. Communities are interested in hosting, but on their terms. These insights provide a blueprint: tourism can grow if it respects local culture, strengthens local capacity and benefits the communities that live there.

Note: The total numbers in the chart represent the number of responses, as the survey allowed for up to three responses per participant; this amount is therefore higher than the total survey participant number of 327.



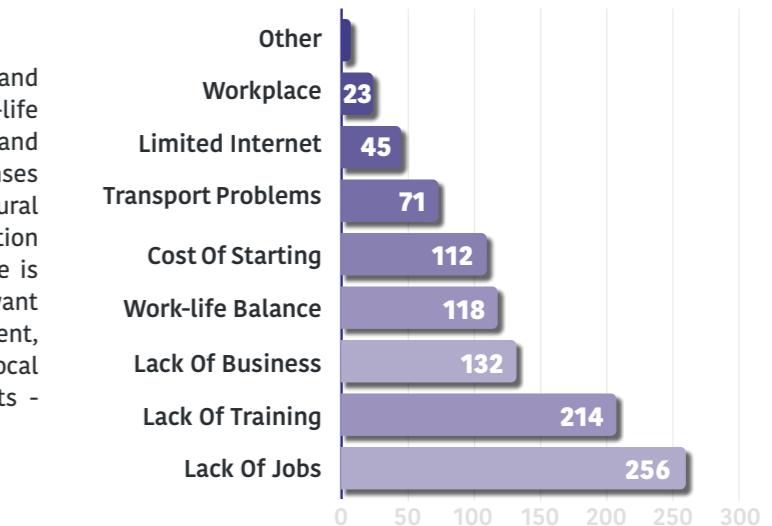
4.2.8. Are There Enough Local Jobs?

A striking 90% of respondents said there are not enough jobs. Only 4% said "Yes," with 6% unsure. This signals urgent concern about employment access and quality. The job gap may be tied to limited local businesses, lack of industry diversity, or over-reliance on short-term or government-based roles. This feedback aligns with other survey responses on training and enterprise development. People want more than just "any" job - they want meaningful work in their communities. The call is clear: Torres Strait Islanders are ready to work but need better, locally relevant opportunities to thrive on their islands without having to leave home.



4.2.9. Barriers to Employment & Business

The most significant barriers were lack of jobs (26%) and training (22%), followed by business support (13%), work-life balance (12%) and start-up costs (11%). Transport (7%) and internet access (5%) add to the challenge. The responses reflect motivated communities held back by structural issues, rather than a lack of ambition. While discrimination scored low (2%), it may be under-reported. The message is clear: communities know what's holding them back and want targeted solutions. Opportunities for skills development, enterprise funding, and infrastructure would unlock local potential. The will to participate in the economy exists - what's missing are the enabling systems to support it.



Note: The total numbers in the chart represent the number of responses, as the survey allowed for up to three responses per participant; this amount is therefore higher than the total survey participant number of 327.

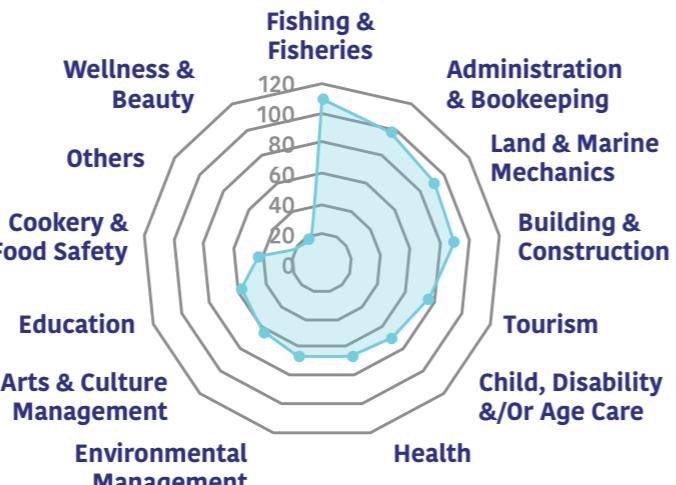


4.2.10. The Training Communities Want

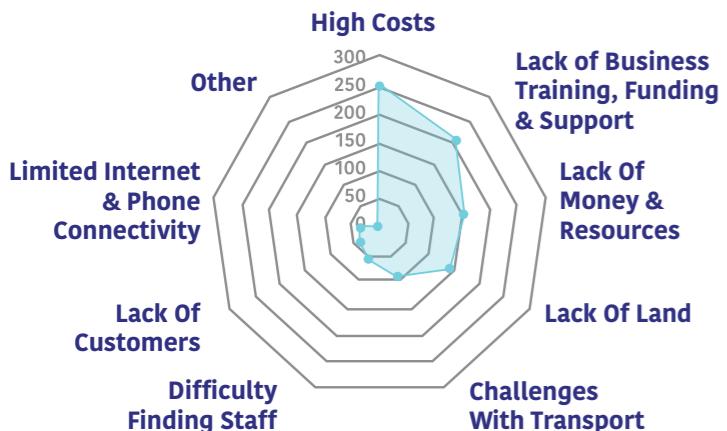
Community members consistently called for practical, work-ready training that leads directly to employment or self-employment. Business development, general job readiness and leadership/governance were highly rated, indicating a desire for both technical and soft skills. There's a strong interest in locally delivered training that respects cultural learning styles. IT and environmental training were also noted, particularly for youth and land/sea management roles. Many saw training as a pathway to economic independence, especially for women and young adults. The community isn't just asking for education - they're asking for purpose-built learning that equips them for real opportunities on their islands.

4.2.11. Building A Local Workforce

The most requested training areas were fisheries, marine operations, construction, administration, and health care - linking traditional strengths with service gaps. Other priorities included education, tourism and arts management, indicating a broad economic vision. People want training that is practical, relevant and allows them to live and work on-island. The future focus should be on building careers without needing to leave Country. Many respondents highlighted the need for more accredited training pathways delivered locally, by trusted providers. The data reflects an ambition to build a skilled Torres Strait workforce that can support community needs, local industries, and long-term self-determination.



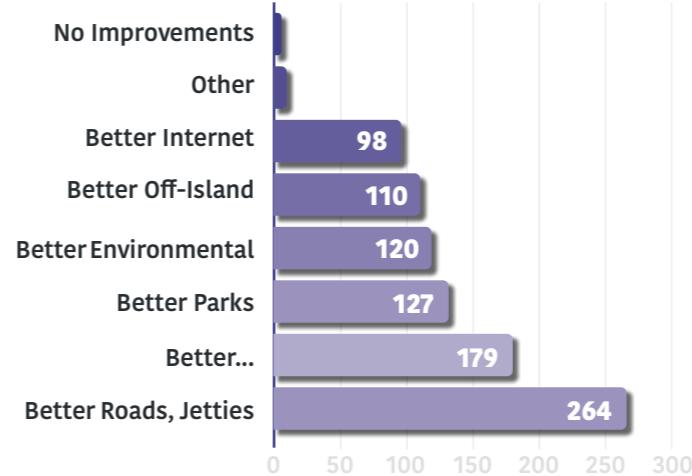
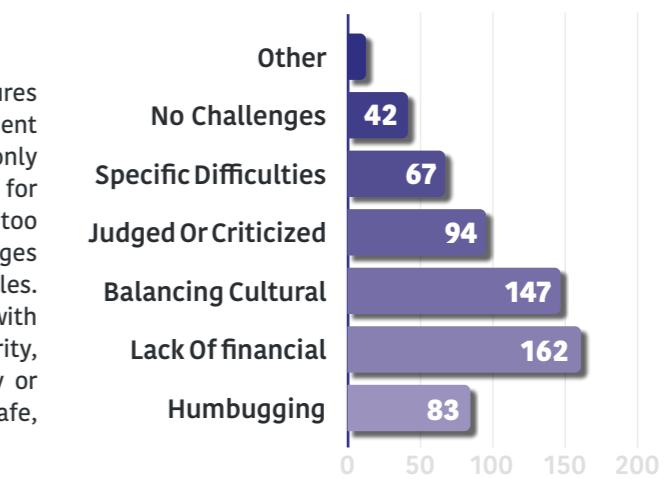
4.2.12. Real Challenges for Local Enterprise



Small business owners face high operating costs, a lack of start-up funding, a limited market size and infrastructure gaps. Staffing shortages, inconsistent internet and transport barriers further strain business viability. Business owners are motivated, but many feel unsupported. Their challenges aren't about effort - they stem from trying to operate in a system not designed for small, remote economies. There is a strong entrepreneurial spirit across the Torres Strait, but the landscape remains uneven. Business owners want investment, mentoring and tailored support. They're not asking for handouts - just fair conditions to succeed in delivering goods, products and services from within their communities.

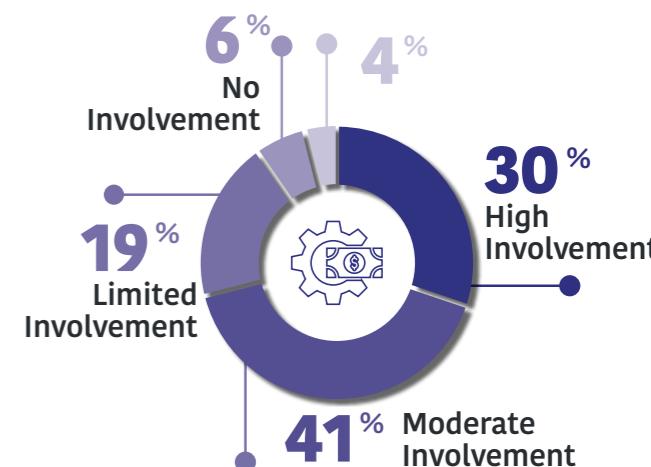
4.2.13. Walking the Line Between Money & Meaning

Many respondents identified cultural and social pressures that complicate business success. "Humbugging," judgment and balancing kinship obligations with profit were commonly noted. Financial literacy was seen as a barrier, especially for those new to enterprise. Some feared being seen as "too successful" or not sharing wealth. Gender-based challenges also surfaced, particularly for women navigating cultural roles. This data shows success isn't just financial - it must align with cultural expectations. Torres Strait Islanders want prosperity, but not at the expense of respect, community harmony or artistic integrity. Business models must be culturally safe, community-led and grounded in shared values.



4.2.14. Infrastructure That Unlocks Opportunity

Transport infrastructure was the top priority - better jetties, boat ramps, airstrips, and freight access. Accommodation, digital connectivity, and community spaces were also common requests. Infrastructure isn't seen as isolated - it's the key that unlocks jobs, tourism, training, and services. Many communities feel ready to grow but physically can't. Whether it's waste systems, roads, or visitor housing, the message is consistent: invest in the basics so that people can build from there. Infrastructure is not just concrete - it's capability. It enables enterprise, empowers mobility and supports resilience. Without it, development remains a conversation rather than a reality.



Community Sessions



As part of Phase 1, community engagement sessions were held across all 15 TSIRC island communities. These on-island sessions formed the foundation for identifying local economic aspirations, priorities and challenges. Engagement was varied but led commonly in partnership with Councillors, Traditional Owners, community organisations, Elders, youth, business owners and community members, ensuring each island's voice was heard and respected in shaping this report.

The project team extends sincere thanks to the on-island TSIRC staff who provided critical support in pre-planning, event

coordination, catering, venue setup, and local transportation. Their leadership, hospitality and commitment were essential in creating welcoming spaces for honest dialogue and meaningful participation. Without their efforts, the success and impact of the engagement would not have been possible. This section presents a visual narrative of the engagement sessions, highlighting the strength, energy and knowledge shared across the islands - captured through photos and field reflections.

Division	Visual Narrative of Community visit and sessions		
Badu Island			
Boigu Island			
Dauan Island			
Erub (Darnley) Island			
Kirriri Island			
Iama (Yam) Island			

Division	Visual Narrative of Community visit and sessions		
Warraber (Sue) Island			
Kubin (Moa) Island			
Mabuiag Island			
Masig (Yorke) Island			
Mer (Murray) Island			
Poruma (Coconut) Island			
Saibai Island			
St Pauls (Moa) Island			
Ugar (Stephen) Island			

Island-by-Island Profiles

Where we are now?



6.1. Introduction

This section presents the 15 Island Economic Development Dashboards, each aligned with the Torres Strait Island Regional Council's Divisions 1 through 15. Developed during Phase 1, the dashboards are a key deliverable of the Economic Development Strategy engagement process and reflect the insights, priorities and aspirations gathered directly from each island community.

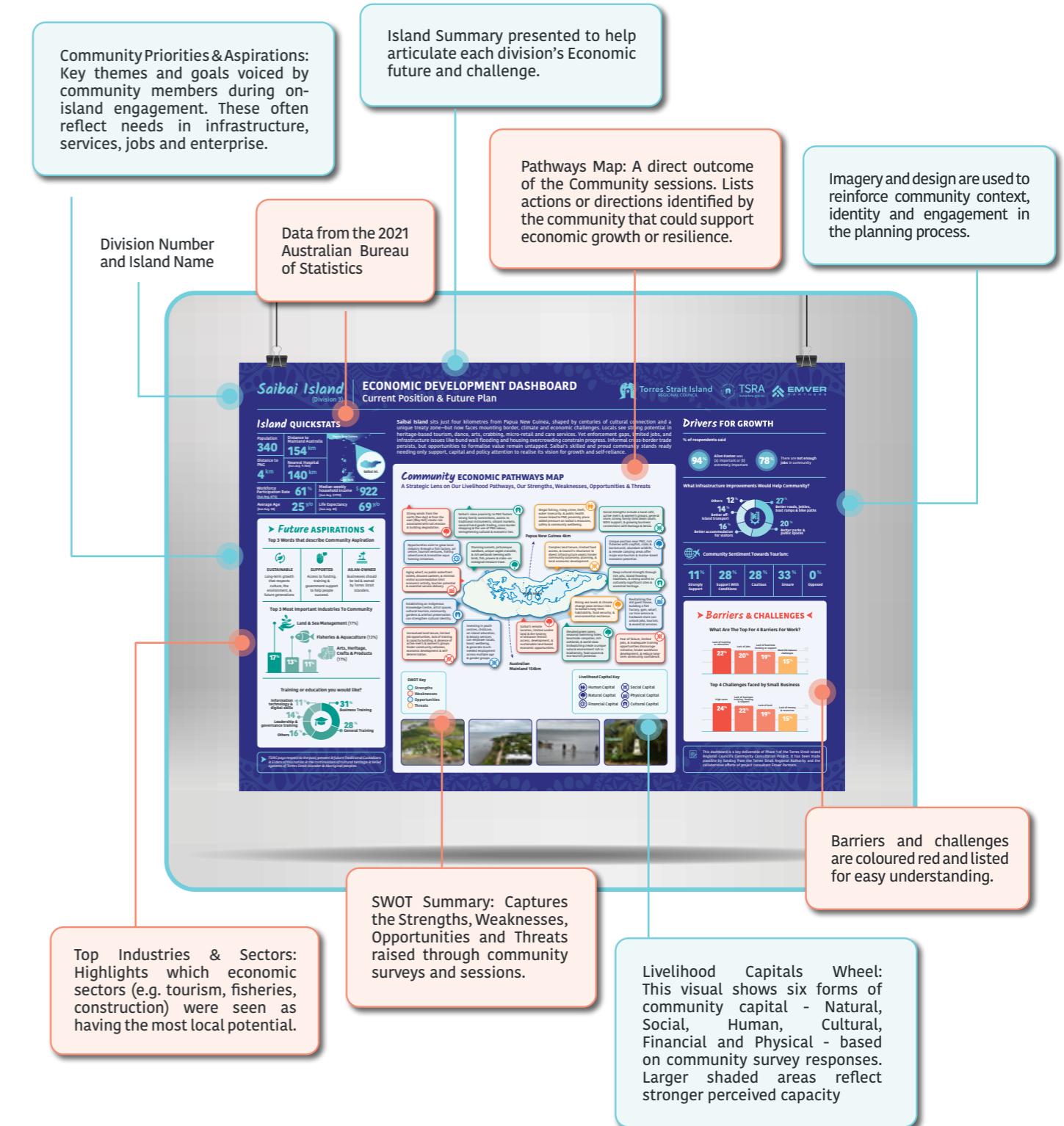
Each dashboard captures a snapshot of the island's current economic landscape, key challenges and opportunities, and community perspectives on industry priorities, infrastructure needs and workforce aspirations. They also include demographic context, SWOT summaries, livelihood capital indicators and strategic pathways.

The dashboards are a key deliverable of the Economic Development Strategy engagement process and reflect the insights, priorities and aspirations gathered directly from each island community.



6.2. How to read the Dashboards

These dashboards are not technical summaries - they are community-facing tools, designed to represent and elevate local voices in future decision-making.



6.3. Island Profiles (next page)

Island QUICKSTATS

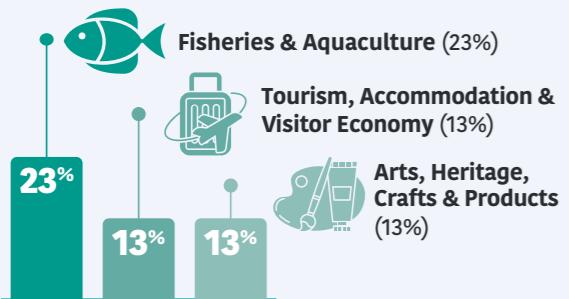
Population 199	Distance to Mainland Australia 170 km	Papua New Guinea
Distance to PNG 6 km	Nearest Hospital (Aus avg. 9.7km) 150 km	Boigu Isl.
Workforce Participation Rate (Aus Avg. 67%) 44%	Median weekly household income (Aus Avg. \$1770) \$1,078	
Average Age (Aus Avg. 38) 25 y/o	Life Expectancy (Aus avg. 83) 69 y/o	

► Future ASPIRATIONS ◀

Top 3 Words that describe Community Aspiration

 SELF-SUFFICIENT Creating opportunities where my community can live without relying on external support	 SUPPORTED Access to funding, training & government support to help people succeed.	 SUSTAINABLE Long-term growth that respects culture, the environment, & future generations
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Top 3 Most Important Industries To Community



Training or education you would like?



► TSIRC pays respect to the past, present & future Traditional Custodians & Elders of this nation & the continuation of cultural heritage & belief systems of Torres Strait Islander & Aboriginal peoples.

Boigu Island is Australia's northernmost inhabited community - just 6 kilometres from Papua New Guinea and is built entirely on low-lying alluvial mudflats. Despite geographic isolation, extreme coastal vulnerability, and limited elevation, Boigu's community remains proactive and ambitious. Opportunities in birdwatching tourism, local art, aquaculture, crabbing and small-scale hospitality show clear entrepreneurial intent. Expanding ranger programs and creating a mens and womens shed can support both employment and wellbeing. Soil loss and flooding challenge food growing and infrastructure, but locally driven solutions like recycling initiatives and sustainable housing demonstrate Boigu's determination to create a resilient, community-led economic future.

Community ECONOMIC PATHWAYS MAP

A Strategic Lens on Our Livelihood Pathways, Our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats

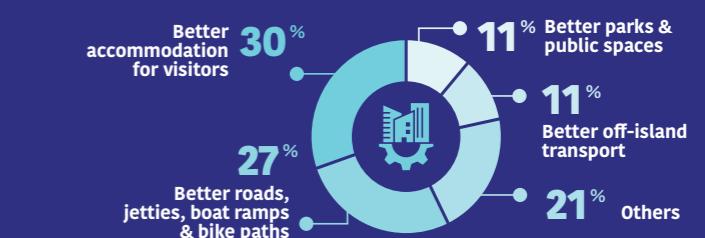


Drivers FOR GROWTH

% of respondents said



What Infrastructure Improvements Would Help Community?

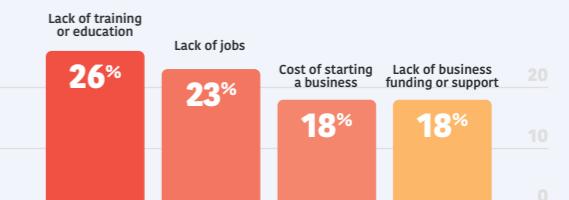


Community Sentiment Towards Tourism Is Largely Positive

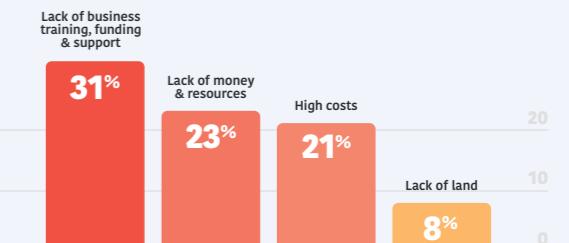


► Barriers & CHALLENGES ◀

What Are The Top 4 Barriers For Work?



Top 4 Challenges faced by Small Business



This dashboard is a key deliverable of Phase 1 of the Torres Strait Island Regional Council's Community Consultation Project. It has been made possible by funding from the Torres Strait Regional Authority and the collaborative efforts of project consultant Emver Partners.

Island QUICKSTATS

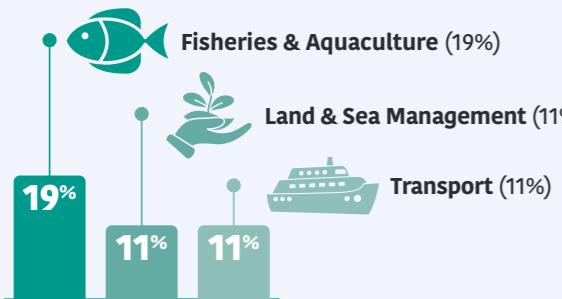
Population 131	Distance to Mainland Australia 150 km	
Distance to PNG 11 km	Nearest Hospital (Aus avg. 9.7km) 135 km	
Workforce Participation Rate (Aus Avg. 67%) 58 %	Median weekly household income (Aus Avg. \$1770) \$739	
Average Age (Aus Avg. 38) 21 y/o	Life Expectancy (Aus avg. 83) 69 y/o	

► Future ASPIRATIONS ◀

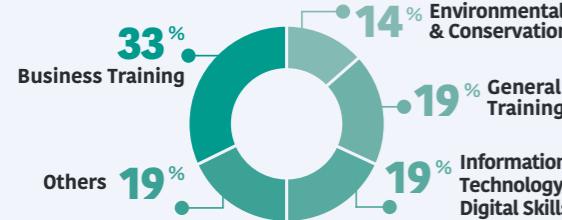
Top 3 Words that describe Community Aspiration

		
AILAN-OWNED Businesses should be led & owned by Torres Strait Islanders.	SUPPORTED Access to funding, training & government support to help people succeed.	SUSTAINABLE Long-term growth that respects culture, the environment, & future generations

Top 3 Most Important Industries To Community



Training or education you would like?



► TSIRC pays respect to the past, present & future Traditional Custodians & Elders of this nation & the continuation of cultural heritage & belief systems of Torres Strait Islander & Aboriginal peoples.

Dauan Island, rising steeply from the Torres Strait's northern edge, lies just 11 kilometres from Papua New Guinea - facing both cross-border risks and strategic opportunity. Its elevated terrain and rare arable land offer unique potential for small-scale agriculture, while recent investments in fisheries infrastructure could strengthen economic self-reliance. Endemic wildlife and intact ecosystems position Dauan for low-impact, nature-based tourism. However, unresolved land tenure and limited digital connectivity constrain progress. Despite these challenges, Dauan's community-led values - anchored in tradition, family structure and language preservation - underscore its readiness for targeted, culturally informed economic development and border-facing enterprise.

Community ECONOMIC PATHWAYS MAP

A Strategic Lens on Our Livelihood Pathways, Our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats



Drivers FOR GROWTH

% of respondents said

94 % Ailan Kastom was (a) important or (b) extremely important

94 % There are not enough jobs in community

What Infrastructure Improvements Would Help Community?

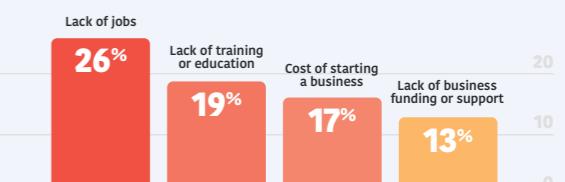


Community Sentiment Towards Tourism Is Largely Positive



► Barriers & CHALLENGES ◀

What Are The Top For 4 Barriers For Work?



Top 4 Challenges faced by Small Business



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Island QUICKSTATS

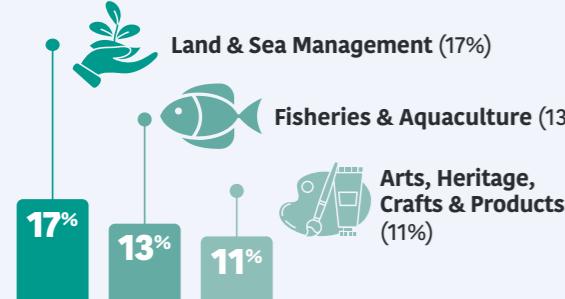
Population	Distance to Mainland Australia	
340	154 km	
Distance to PNG	Nearest Hospital (Aus avg. 9.7km)	140 km
4 km		
Workforce Participation Rate (Aus Avg. 67%)	61%	Median weekly household income (Aus Avg. \$1770) \$922
Average Age (Aus Avg. 38)	25 y/o	Life Expectancy (Aus avg. 83) 69 y/o

► Future ASPIRATIONS ◀

Top 3 Words that describe Community Aspiration

 SUSTAINABLE Long-term growth that respects culture, the environment, & future generations	 SUPPORTED Access to funding, training & government support to help people succeed.	 AILAN-OWNED Businesses should be led & owned by Torres Strait Islanders.
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Top 3 Most Important Industries To Community



Training or education you would like?

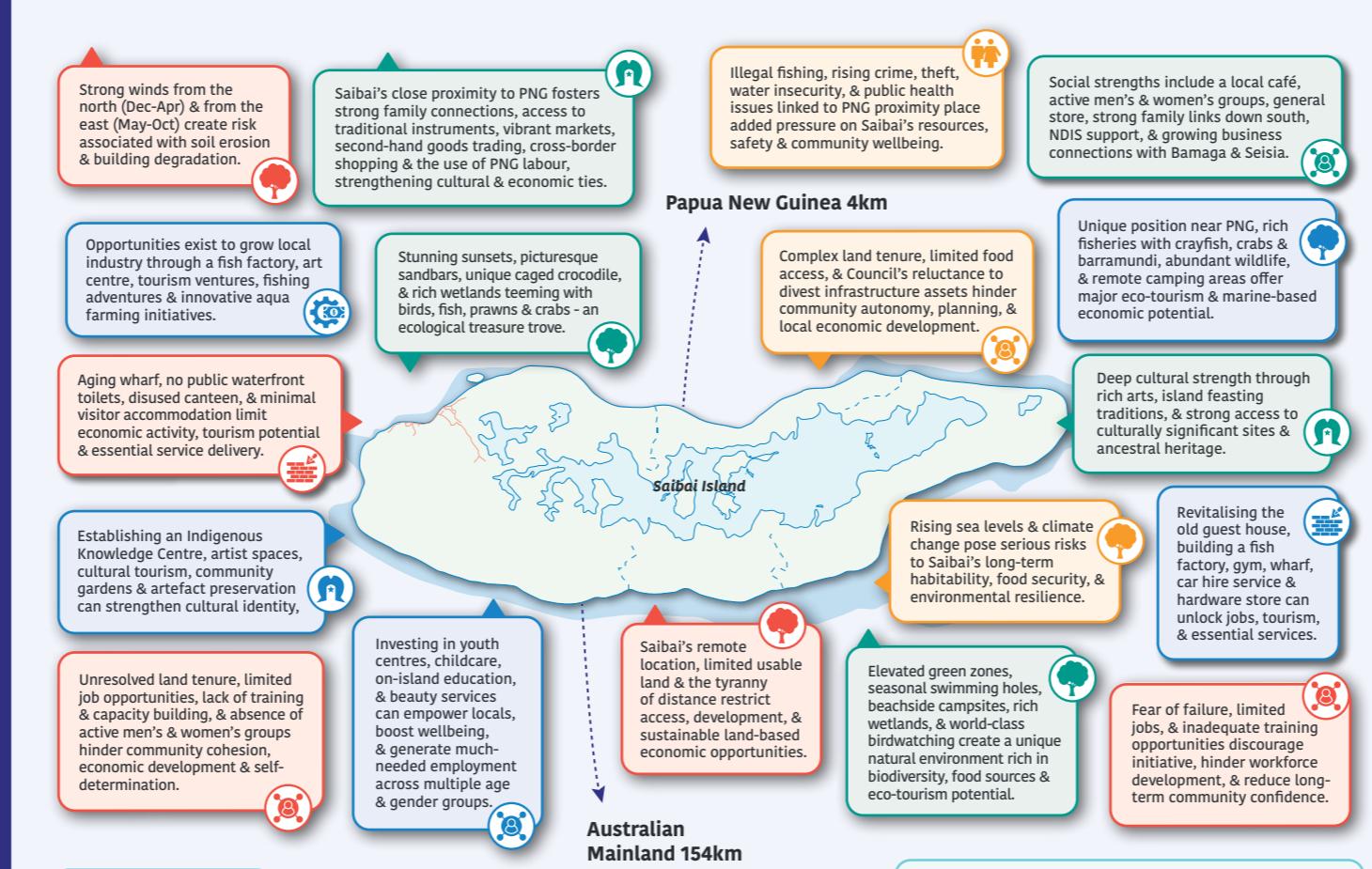


► TSIRC pays respect to the past, present & future Traditional Custodians & Elders of this nation & the continuation of cultural heritage & belief systems of Torres Strait Islander & Aboriginal peoples.

Saibai Island sits just four kilometres from Papua New Guinea, shaped by centuries of cultural connection and a unique treaty zone - but now faces mounting border, climate and economic challenges. Locals see strong potential in heritage-based tourism, dance, arts, crabbing, micro-retail and care services. Yet enforcement gaps, limited jobs, and infrastructure issues like bund wall flooding and housing overcrowding constrain progress. Informal cross-border trade persists, but opportunities to formalise value remain untapped. Saibai's skilled and proud community stands ready needing only support, capital and policy attention to realise its vision for growth and self-reliance.

Community ECONOMIC PATHWAYS MAP

A Strategic Lens on Our Livelihood Pathways, Our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats



SWOT Key

- Strengths (Green)
- Weaknesses (Red)
- Opportunities (Blue)
- Threats (Orange)



Livelihood Capital Key

- Human Capital (Person icon)
- Social Capital (Group icon)
- Natural Capital (Tree icon)
- Physical Capital (Building icon)
- Financial Capital (Dollar icon)
- Cultural Capital (Cultural icon)

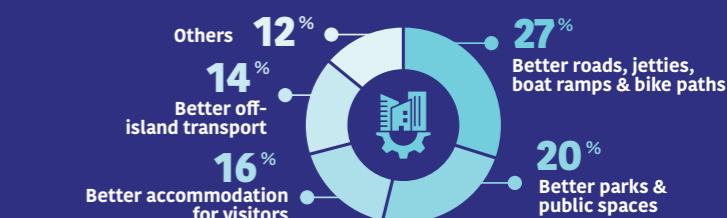
Drivers FOR GROWTH

% of respondents said

94% Ailan Kastom was (a) important or (b) extremely important

78% There are not enough jobs in community

What Infrastructure Improvements Would Help Community?

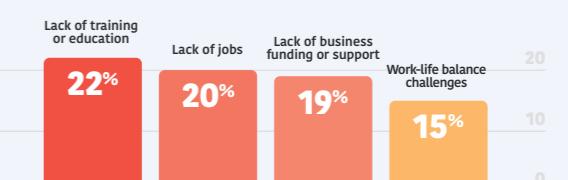


Community Sentiment Towards Tourism:

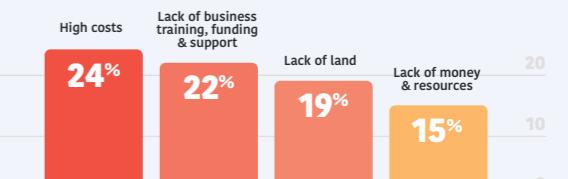


► Barriers & CHALLENGES ◀

What Are The Top 4 Barriers For Work?



Top 4 Challenges faced by Small Business



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Island QUICKSTATS

Population 253	Distance to Mainland Australia 90 km	Papua New Guinea 
Distance to PNG 80 km	Nearest Hospital (Aus avg. 9.7km) 69 km	
Workforce Participation Rate (Aus Avg. 67%) 53 %	Median weekly household income (Aus Avg. \$1770) \$1,281	
Average Age (Aus Avg. 38) 21 y/o	Life Expectancy (Aus avg. 83) 69 y/o	

► Future ASPIRATIONS ◀

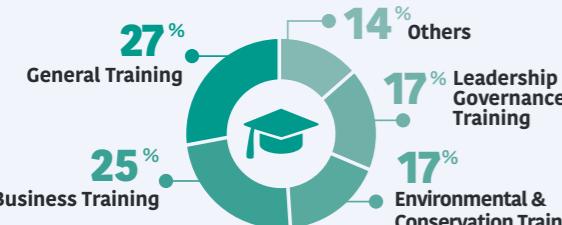
Top 3 Words that describe Community Aspiration

 SUSTAINABLE Long-term growth that respects culture, the environment, & future generations	 SUPPORTED Access to funding, training & government support to help people succeed.	 SELF-SUFFICIENT Creating opportunities where my community can live without relying on external
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Top 3 Most Important Industries To Community



Training or education you would like?



Mabuiag Island, considered a cultural motherland within the western Torres Strait, holds deep ancestral significance and untapped economic potential. An arts and cultural centre is a longstanding community priority - seen as key to jobs, cultural preservation and pride. Informal tourism exists, with potential for growth through small, managed groups. However, cost-of-living pressures, limited childcare, and land leasing constraints impede progress. Home-based enterprise, small-scale agriculture and better infrastructure could foster local prosperity. Mabuiag's call is clear: support culturally grounded development and create space for community-led change because standing still is no longer an option.

Community ECONOMIC PATHWAYS MAP

A Strategic Lens on Our Livelihood Pathways, Our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats



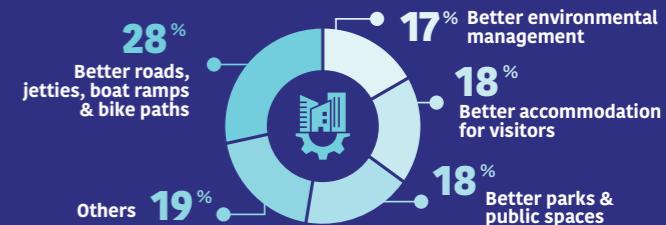
Drivers FOR GROWTH

% of respondents said

92 %
Ailan Kastom was (a) important or (b) extremely important

92 %
There are not enough jobs in community

What Infrastructure Improvements Would Help Community?



Community Sentiment Towards Tourism Is Largely Positive

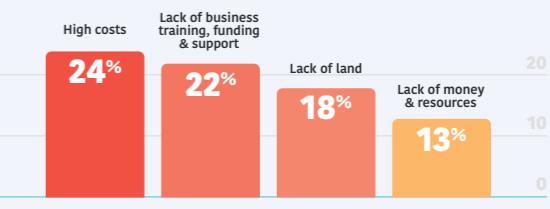


► Barriers & CHALLENGES ◀

What Are The Top 4 Barriers For Work?



Top 4 Challenges faced by Small Business



Island QUICKSTATS

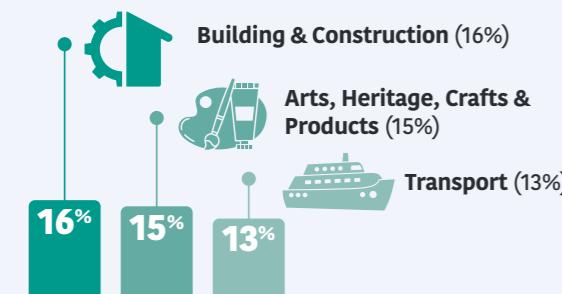
Population	704	Distance to Mainland Australia	72 km	Papua New Guinea
Distance to PNG	100 km	Nearest Hospital (Aus avg. 9.7km)	48 km	
Workforce Participation Rate (Aus Avg. 67%)	42 %	Median weekly household income (Aus Avg. \$1770)	\$ 885	
Average Age (Aus Avg. 38)	27 y/o	Life Expectancy (Aus avg. 83)	69 y/o	

► Future ASPIRATIONS ◀

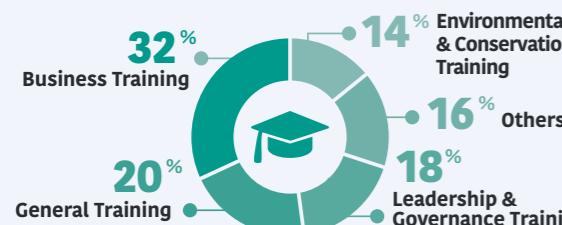
Top 3 Words that describe Community Aspiration

		
SUSTAINABLE Long-term growth that respects culture, the environment, & future generations	AUTONOMOUS Having the power to make my own decisions for my own future.	SUPPORTED Access to funding, training & government support to help people succeed.

Top 3 Most Important Industries To Community



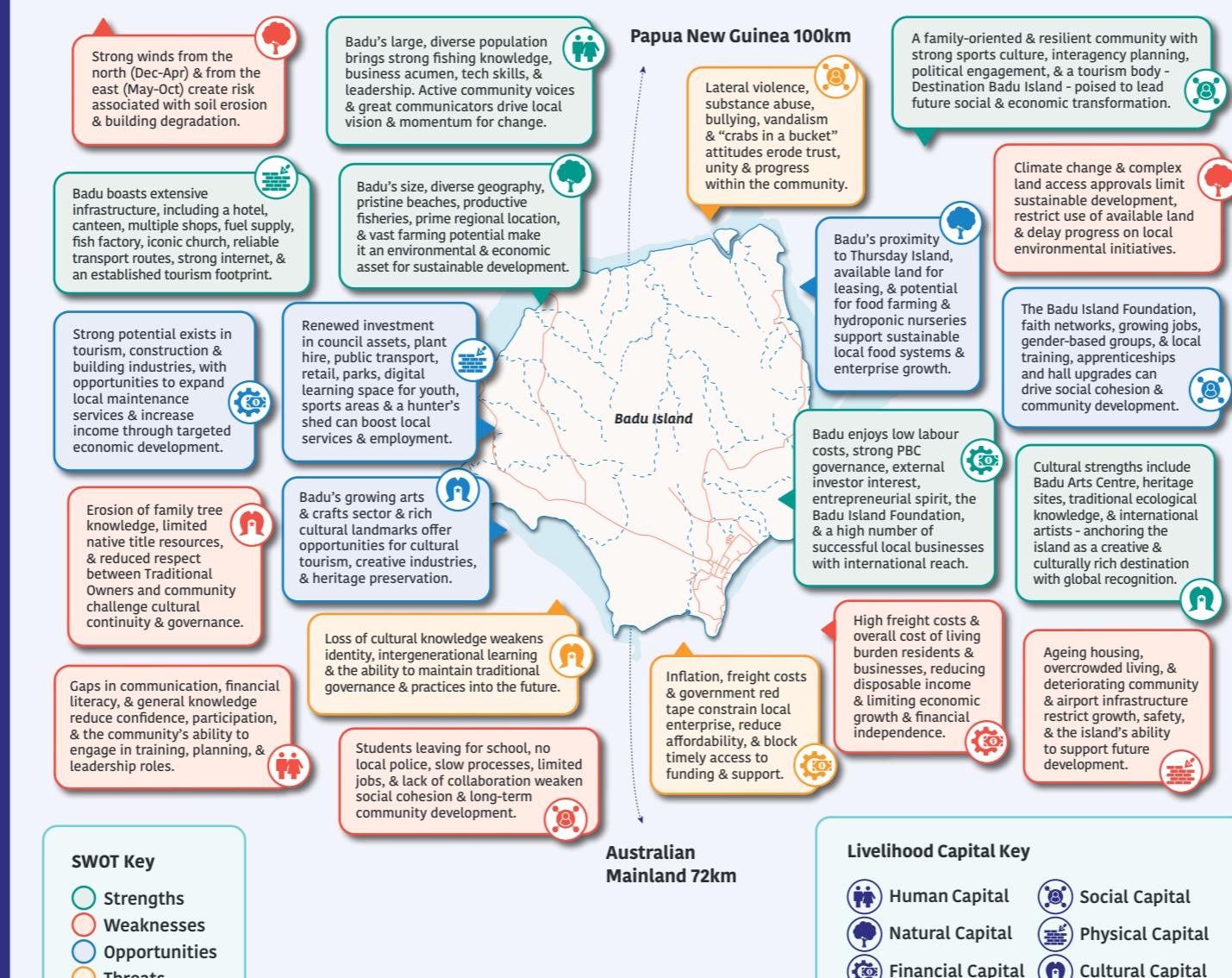
Training or education you would like?



Badu Island, one of the Torres Strait's largest and most geographically diverse islands, is a commercial fisheries stronghold with growing tourism potential. Its proximity to the inner islands and Horn Island Airport strengthens access and opportunity. Locals emphasise the need for real jobs, business land allocation, and mentoring to drive economic change. Overcrowding, freight costs and limited infrastructure - especially the community ramp - remain key barriers. With targeted investment in housing, on-island training, and tourism, Badu is poised to evolve into a diverse economic centre, grounded in equity, sea country, and self-determination.

Community ECONOMIC PATHWAYS MAP

A Strategic Lens on Our Livelihood Pathways, Our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats



SWOT Key

- Strengths (Green)
- Weaknesses (Red)
- Opportunities (Blue)
- Threats (Orange)

Livelihood Capital Key

Human Capital	Social Capital
Natural Capital	Physical Capital
Financial Capital	Cultural Capital

Barriers & CHALLENGES

Drivers FOR GROWTH

% of respondents said

100% Ailan Kastom was (a) important or (b) extremely important

92% There are not enough jobs in community

What Infrastructure Improvements Would Help Community?

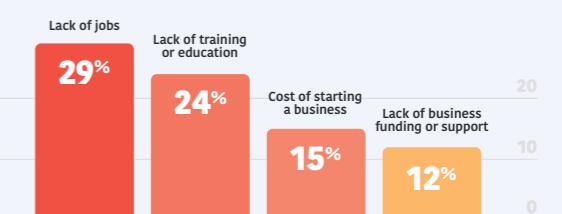


Community Sentiment Towards Tourism Is Largely Positive

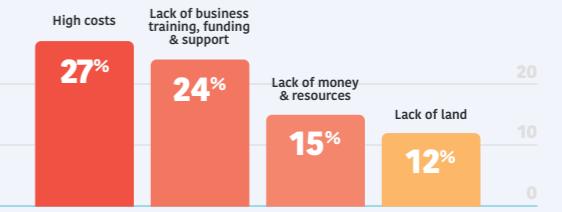


► Barriers & CHALLENGES ◀

What Are The Top 4 Barriers For Work?



Top 4 Challenges faced by Small Business



Island QUICKSTATS

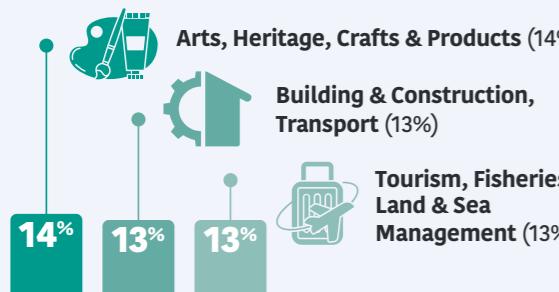
Population	220	Distance to Mainland Australia	60 km	Papua New Guinea
Distance to PNG	110 km	Nearest Hospital (Aus avg. 9.7km)	40 km	Moa Island
Workforce Participation Rate (Aus Avg. 67%)	54 %	Median weekly household income (Aus Avg. \$1770)	\$ 725	Cape York
Average Age (Aus Avg. 38)	25 y/o	Life Expectancy (Aus avg. 83)	69 y/o	

► Future ASPIRATIONS ◀

Top 3 Words that describe Community Aspiration

 SUSTAINABLE Long-term growth that respects culture, the environment, & future generations	 AILAN-OWNED Businesses should be led & owned by Torres Strait Islanders.	 SUPPORTED Access to funding, training & government support to help people succeed.
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Top 3 Most Important Industries To Community



Training or education you would like?

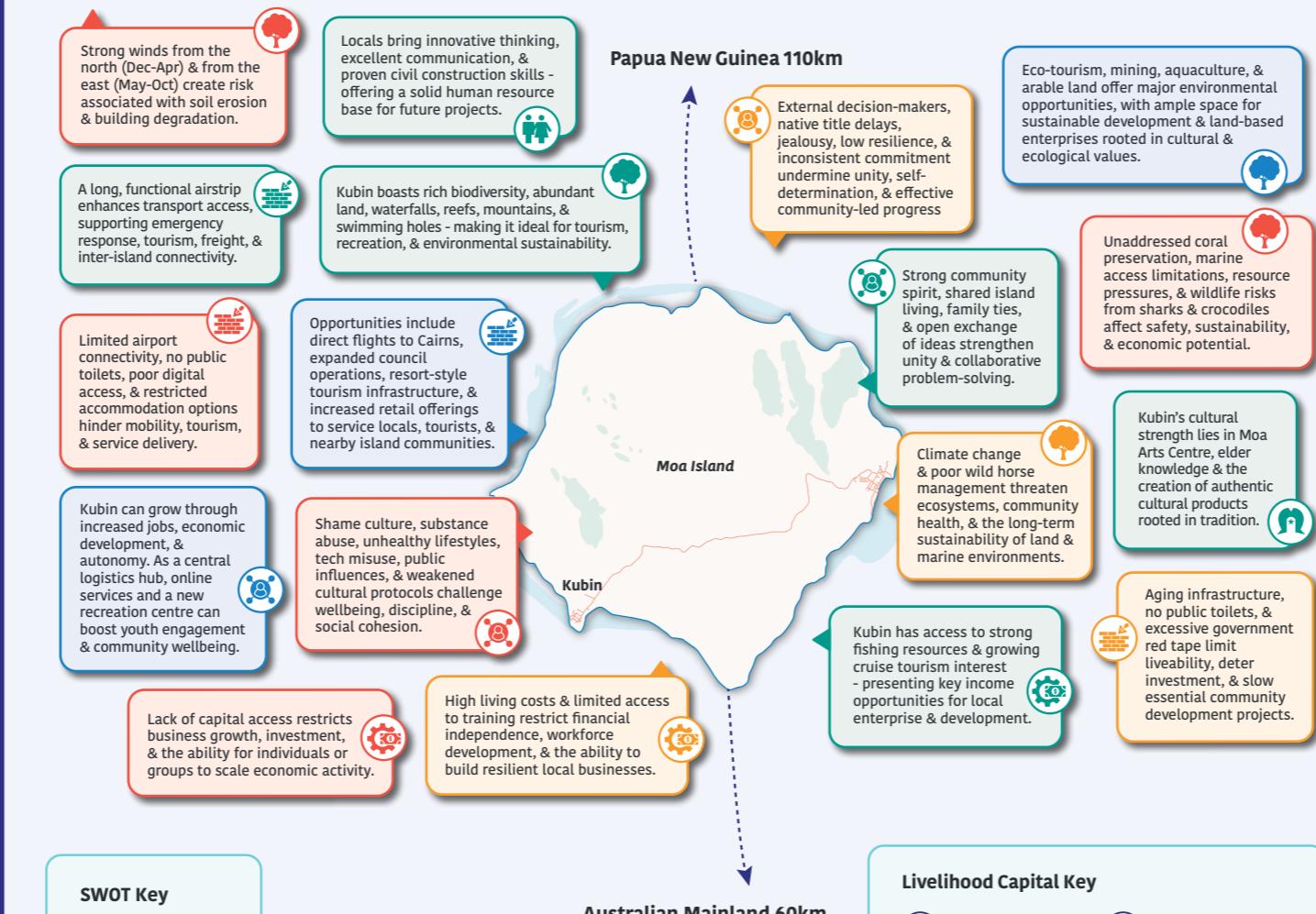


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Kubin, one of two communities on Moa - the Torres Strait's second-largest island - is uniquely positioned near Thursday Island, offering logistical advantages across fisheries, construction and trade. Anchored by Moa Arts and a proud history of cultivation and fishing, Kubin is poised to grow through fisheries, cultural tourism and small-scale agriculture. Yet degraded marine access, land tenure complexity and limited amenities constrain progress. Renewables, vessel upgrades and airport expansion are seen as game changers. With strategic support, Kubin can shift from surviving at the end of the supply chain to thriving as a regional production and cultural hub.

Community ECONOMIC PATHWAYS MAP

A Strategic Lens on Our Livelihood Pathways, Our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats



SWOT Key

- Strengths (Green)
- Weaknesses (Red)
- Opportunities (Blue)
- Threats (Orange)

Livelihood Capital Key

Human Capital	Social Capital
Natural Capital	Physical Capital
Financial Capital	Cultural Capital



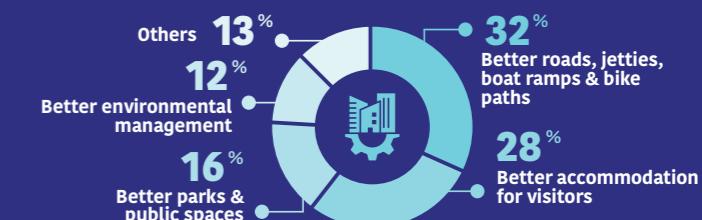
Drivers FOR GROWTH

% of respondents said

96%
Ailan Kastom was (a) important or (b) extremely important

96%
There are not enough jobs in community

What Infrastructure Improvements Would Help Community?

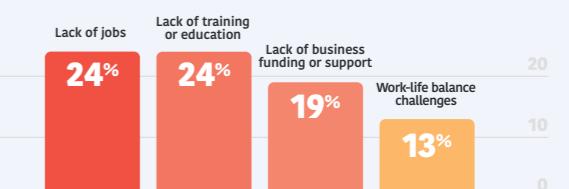


Community Sentiment Towards Tourism Is Largely Positive

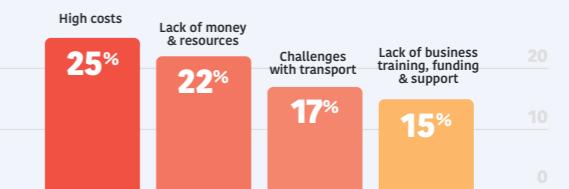


► Barriers & CHALLENGES ◀

What Are The Top For 4 Barriers For Work?



Top 4 Challenges faced by Small Business



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Island QUICKSTATS

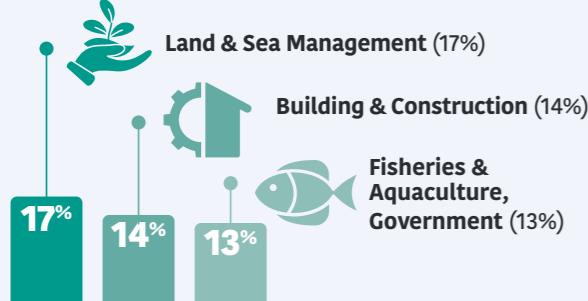
Population 250	Distance to Mainland Australia 64 km	Papua New Guinea
Distance to PNG 100 km	Nearest Hospital (Aus avg. 9.7km) 46 km	Moa Island
Workforce Participation Rate (Aus Avg. 67%) 57%	Median weekly household income (Aus Avg. \$1770) \$956	Cape York
Average Age (Aus Avg. 38) 32 y/o	Life Expectancy (Aus avg. 83) 69 y/o	

► Future ASPIRATIONS ◀

Top 3 Words that describe Community Aspiration

 SUPPORTED Access to funding, training & government support to help people succeed.	 SUSTAINABLE Long-term growth that respects culture, the environment, & future generations	 AILAN-OWNED Businesses should be led & owned by Torres Strait Islanders.
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Top 3 Most Important Industries To Community



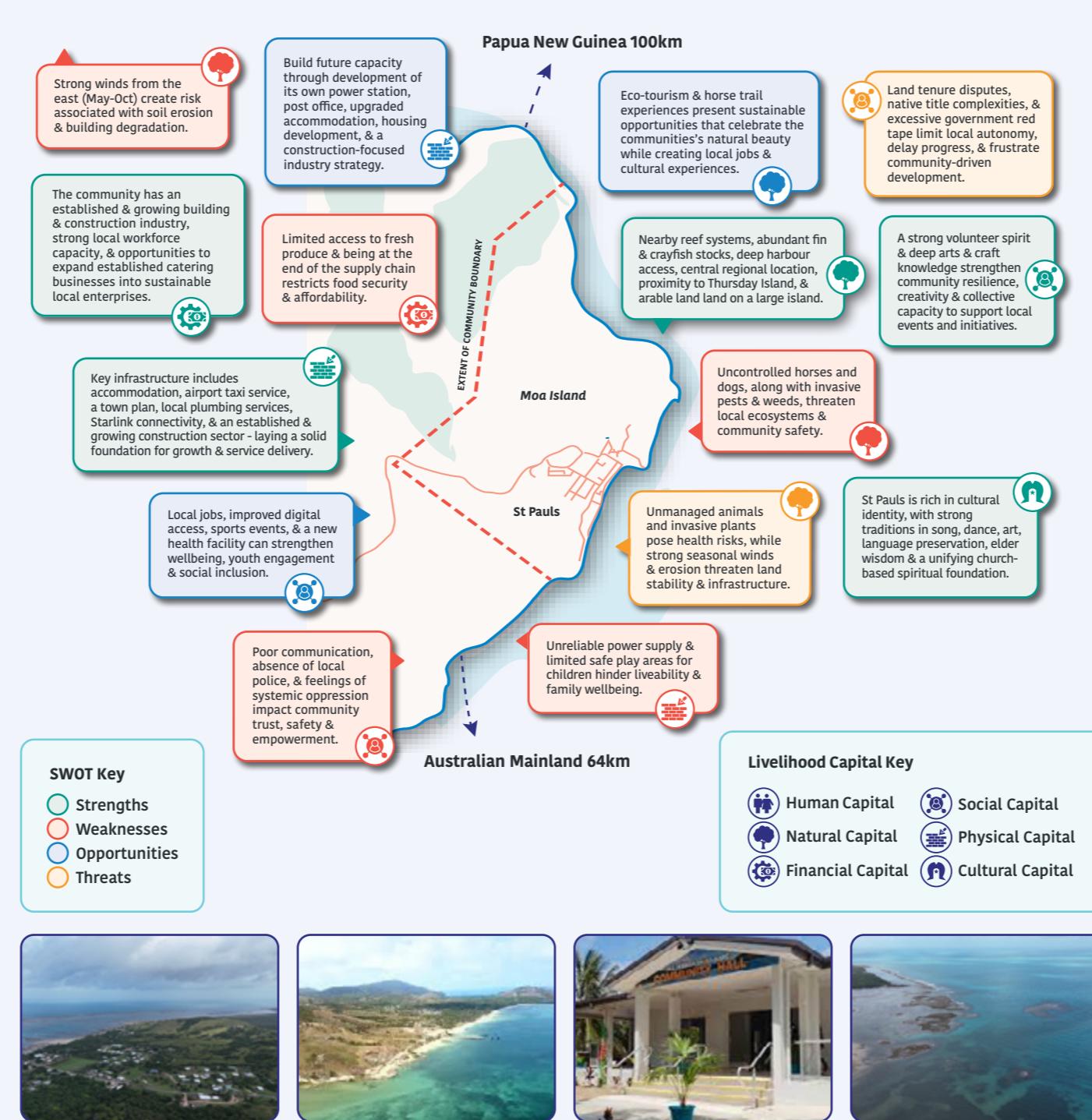
Training or education you would like?



St Pauls, one of two communities on Moa Island, blends deep cultural roots with tangible economic assets - including a sealed road connection, deep harbour access and a strong construction skill base. Despite land tenure complexity and restrictive policy settings, locals aspire to long-term prosperity and autonomy. Small businesses in accommodation and trades are active, with further potential in fin-fish, tackle, and agribusiness ventures like mangoes and livestock. Tourism is minimal, but the reef and harbour offer future promise. With less red tape and targeted support, St Pauls could become a model for regional, community-led development.

Community ECONOMIC PATHWAYS MAP

A Strategic Lens on Our Livelihood Pathways, Our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats

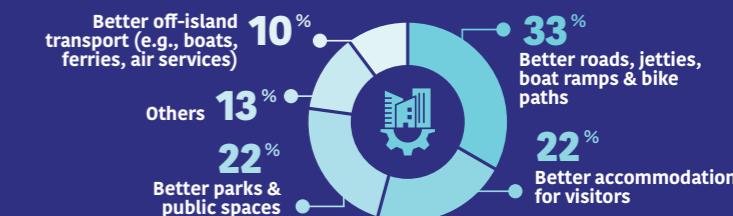


Drivers FOR GROWTH

% of respondents said



What Infrastructure Improvements Would Help Community?

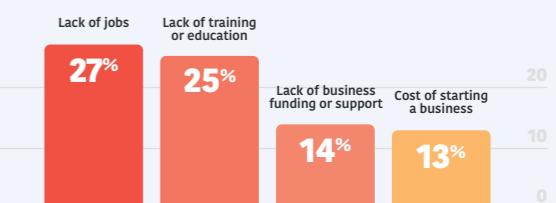


Community Sentiment Towards Tourism Is Largely Positive



► Barriers & CHALLENGES ◀

What Are The Top 4 Barriers For Work?



Top 4 Challenges faced by Small Business



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Island QUICKSTATS

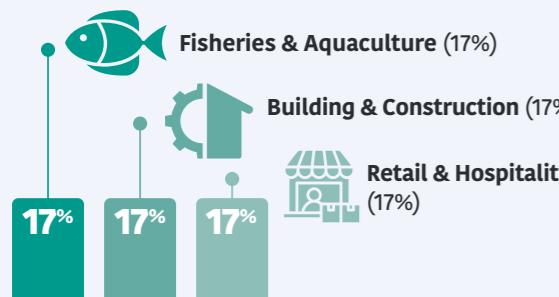
Population 261	Distance to Mainland Australia 30 km	Papua New Guinea
Distance to PNG 140 km	Nearest Hospital (Aus avg. 9.7km) 4 km	
Workforce Participation Rate (Aus Avg. 67%) 56 %	Median weekly household income (Aus Avg. \$1770) \$ 933	
Average Age (Aus Avg. 38) 31 y/o	Life Expectancy (Aus avg. 83) 69 y/o	

► Future ASPIRATIONS ◀

Top 3 Words that describe Community Aspiration

SUSTAINABLE Long-term growth that respects culture, the environment, & future generations	SUPPORTED Access to funding, training & government support to help people succeed.	INSPIRED New ideas that create opportunities and success in the region.

Top 3 Most Important Industries To Community



Training or education you would like?

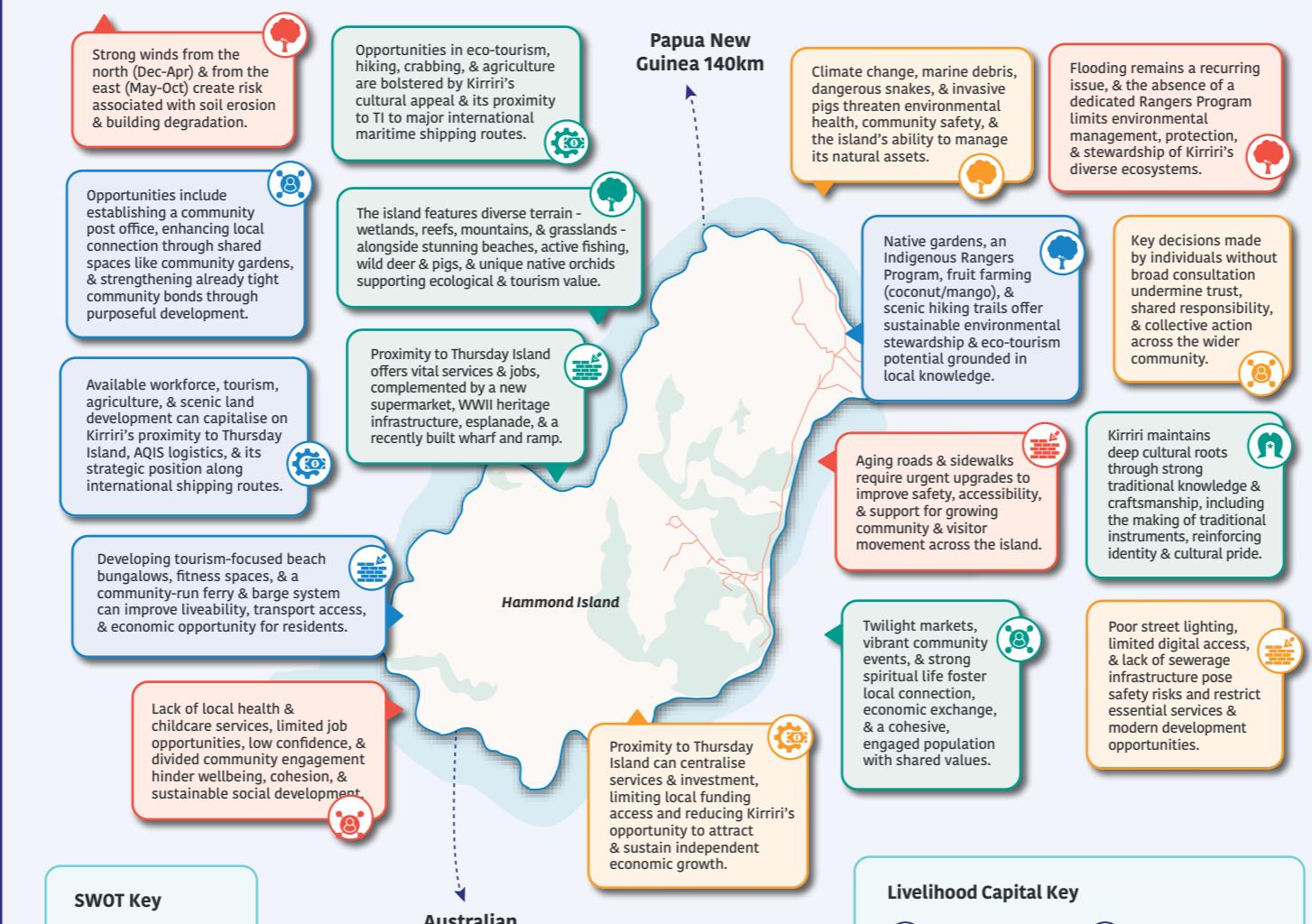


► TSIRC pays respect to the past, present & future Traditional Custodians & Elders of this nation & the continuation of cultural heritage & belief systems of Torres Strait Islander & Aboriginal peoples.

Kirriri (Hammond) Island sits just minutes from Thursday Island, offering strategic proximity, available workforce (from TI), accessible beaches and a rich natural and cultural landscape. Its WWII sites, native orchids, twilight markets and potential for art, fishing and eco-tourism provide strong foundations for enterprise. Yet growth is constrained by land tenure complexities, no on-island healthcare, and outmigration of youth. With a new wharf improving access and free Wi-Fi supporting digital inclusion, Kirriri is well-positioned for targeted investment - especially in ranger programs, training, and visitor infrastructure - to translate its cultural assets and location into sustainable, island-led economic development.

Community ECONOMIC PATHWAYS MAP

A Strategic Lens on Our Livelihood Pathways, Our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats



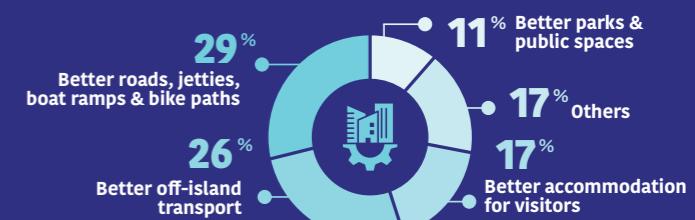
Drivers FOR GROWTH

% of respondents said

100% Ailan Kastom was (a) important or (b) extremely important

92% There are not enough jobs in community

What Infrastructure Improvements Would Help Community?



Community Sentiment Towards Tourism Is Largely Positive



► Barriers & CHALLENGES ◀

What Are The Top 4 Barriers For Work?



Top 4 Challenges faced by Small Business



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Island QUICKSTATS

Population 275	Distance to Mainland Australia 93 km	Papua New Guinea
Distance to PNG 65 km	Nearest Hospital (Aus avg. 9.7km) 100 km	Cape York
Workforce Participation Rate (Aus Avg. 67%) 55 %	Median weekly household income (Aus Avg. \$1770) \$ 900	Iama Island
Average Age (Aus Avg. 38) 29 y/o	Life Expectancy (Aus avg. 83) 69 y/o	

► Future ASPIRATIONS ◀

Top 3 Words that describe Community Aspiration

 SUPPORTED Access to funding, training & government support to help people succeed.	 AILAN-OWNED Businesses should be led & owned by Torres Strait Islanders.	 SUSTAINABLE Long-term growth that respects culture, the environment, & future generations
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Top 3 Most Important Industries To Community



Training or education you would like?



Yam (Iama) Island, centrally located in the Torres Strait and shaped by rugged terrain and natural bays, has long sought economic autonomy - but structural barriers and stalled action persist. With aspirations in fisheries, construction, tourism and aquaculture, the island's potential is clear. Overcrowding, climate impacts and underutilised assets hinder growth, while youth need to leave the island to gain training and job opportunities. Community members call for decolonised thinking, greater local control over retail and facilities, and on-island job creation. With political will, trust, and investment in culturally grounded industries, Yam can emerge as a regional economic and distribution hub.

Community ECONOMIC PATHWAYS MAP

A Strategic Lens on Our Livelihood Pathways, Our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats



SWOT Key

- Strengths (Green)
- Weaknesses (Red)
- Opportunities (Blue)
- Threats (Orange)



Livelihood Capital Key

Human Capital (Person icon)	Social Capital (Group icon)
Natural Capital (Tree icon)	Physical Capital (Building icon)
Financial Capital (Dollar icon)	Cultural Capital (Crown icon)

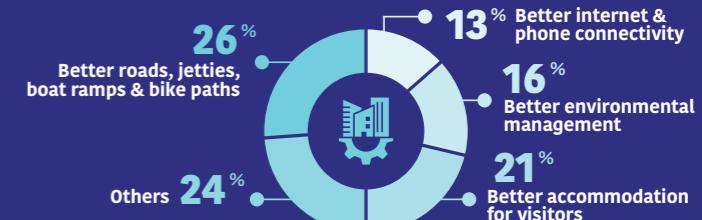
Drivers FOR GROWTH

% of respondents said

96%
Ailan Kastom was (a) important or (b) extremely important

92%
There are not enough jobs in community

What Infrastructure Improvements Would Help Community?

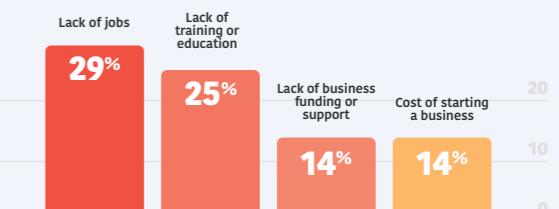


Community Sentiment Towards Tourism Is:



► Barriers & CHALLENGES ◀

What Are The Top For 4 Barriers For Work?



Top 4 Challenges faced by Small Business



Island QUICKSTATS

Population	287	Distance to Mainland Australia	62 km
Distance to PNG	100 km	Nearest Hospital (Aus avg. 9.7km)	80 km
Workforce Participation Rate (Aus Avg. 67%)	57 %	Median weekly household income (Aus Avg. \$1770)	\$ 1,125
Average Age (Aus Avg. 38)	25 y/o	Life Expectancy (Aus avg. 83)	69 y/o

► Future ASPIRATIONS ◀

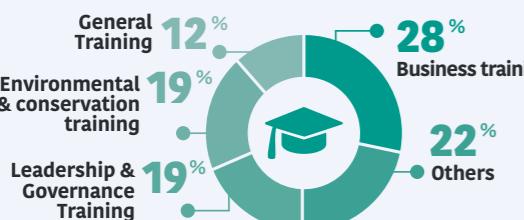
Top 3 Words that describe Community Aspiration

 AILAN-OWNED Businesses should be led & owned by Torres Strait Islanders.	 AUTONOMOUS Having the power to make my own decisions for my own future.	 SUPPORTED Access to funding, training & government support to help people succeed.
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Top 3 Most Important Industries To Community



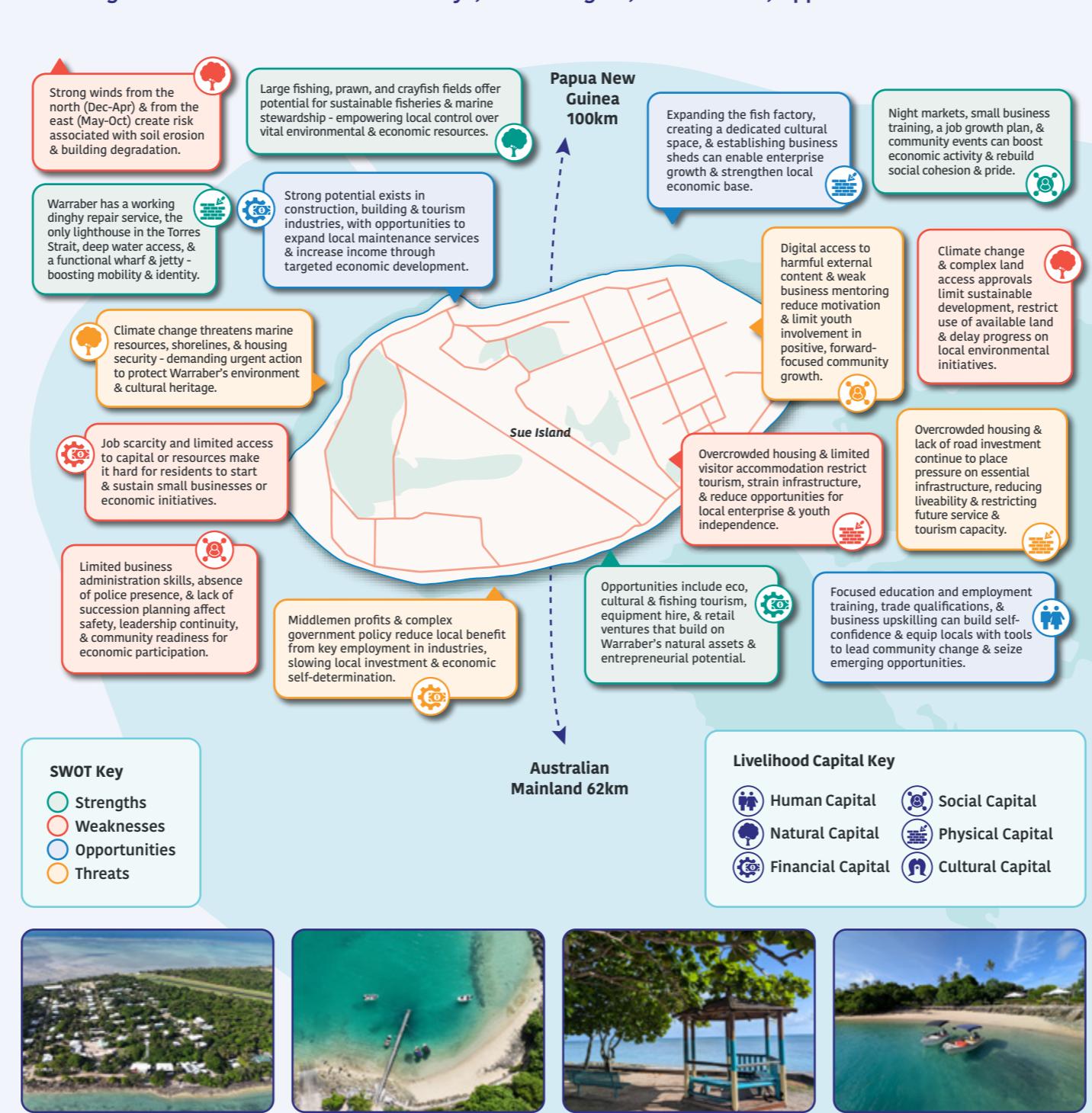
Training or education you would like?



Warraber Island, a 1.2 km long coral cay in the central Torres Strait, is renowned for its strong community spirit and productive crayfish industry - but climate change and underemployment cast long shadows. Cultural tourism, arts, digital merchandise, and small-scale enterprises present real potential, yet housing overcrowding, land tenure issues, and limited training access persist. Locals are calling for home-business guides, targeted youth support, and a stronger voice in managing their own resources. With coordinated investment in local capacity and culturally driven enterprise, Warraber can reshape its economy on its own terms by its people, for its people.

Community ECONOMIC PATHWAYS MAP

A Strategic Lens on Our Livelihood Pathways, Our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats



Drivers FOR GROWTH

% of respondents said

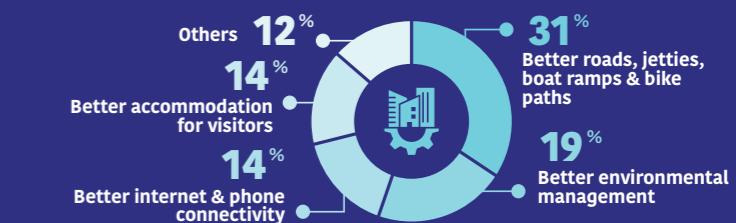
94%

Ailan Kastom was (a) important or (b) extremely important

76%

There are not enough jobs in community

What Infrastructure Improvements Would Help Community?

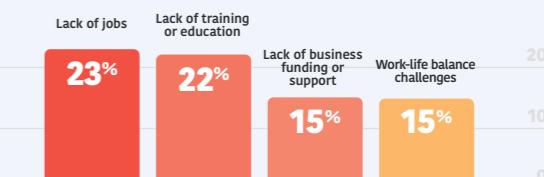


Community Sentiment Towards Tourism is:



► Barriers & CHALLENGES ◀

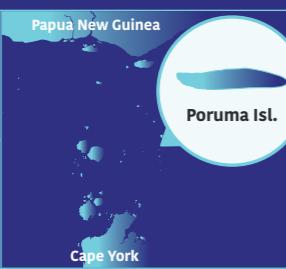
What Are The Top For 4 Barriers For Work?



Top 4 Challenges faced by Small Business



Island QUICKSTATS

Population 164	Distance to Mainland Australia 90 km	
Distance to PNG 91 km	Nearest Hospital (Aus avg. 9.7km) 110 km	
Workforce Participation Rate (Aus Avg. 67%) 55 %	Median weekly household income (Aus Avg. \$1770) \$1,399	
Average Age (Aus Avg. 38) 31 y/o	Life Expectancy (Aus avg. 83) 69 y/o	

► Future ASPIRATIONS ◀

Top 3 Words that describe Community Aspiration

 INSPIRED New ideas that create opportunities and success in the region.	 SELF-SUFFICIENT Creating opportunities where my community can live without relying on external support.	 AILAN-OWNED Businesses should be led & owned by Torres Strait Islanders.
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Top 3 Most Important Industries To Community



Training or education you would like?

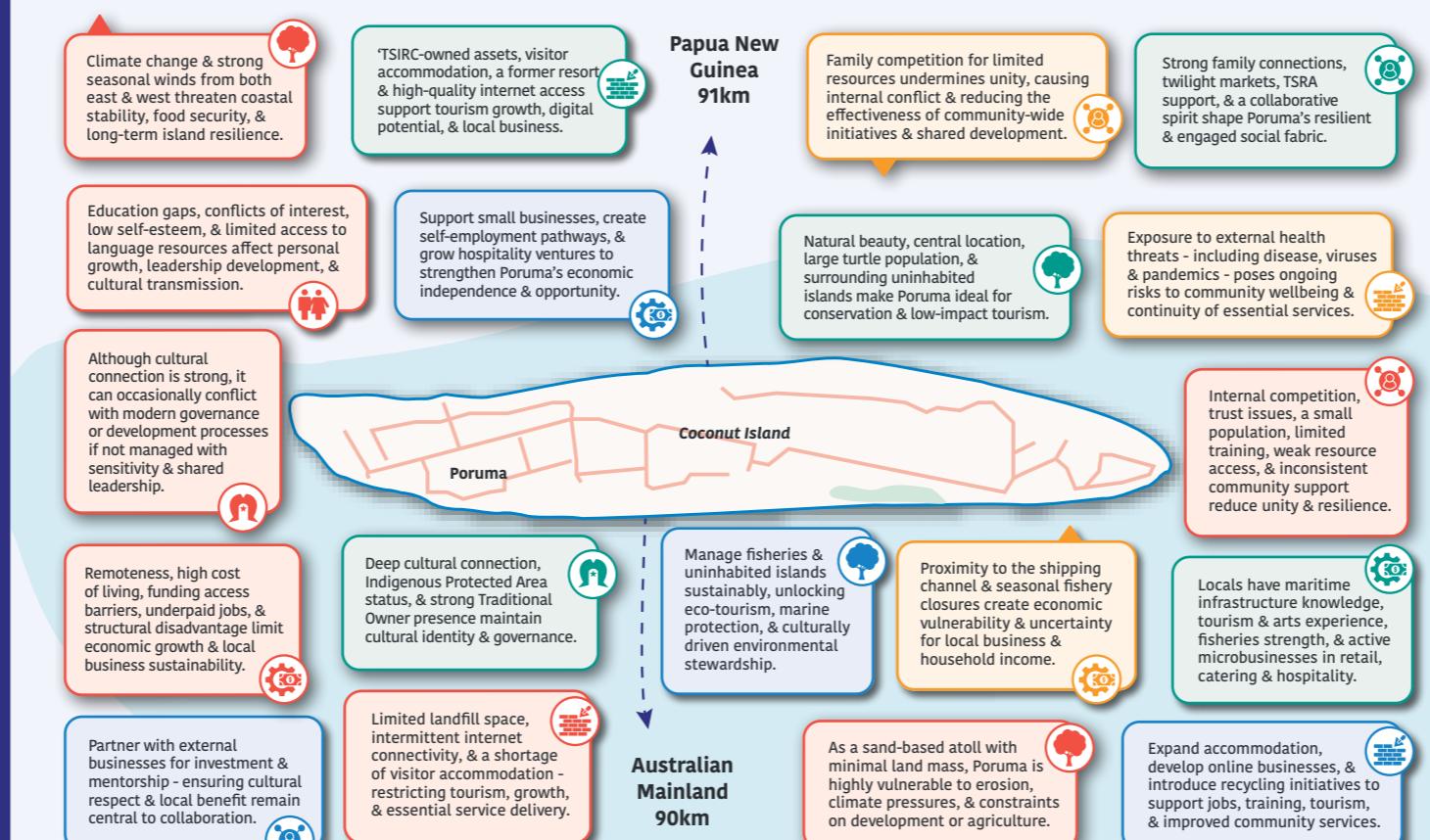


► TSIRC pays respect to the past, present & future Traditional Custodians & Elders of this nation & the continuation of cultural heritage & belief systems of Torres Strait Islander & Aboriginal peoples.

Poruma (Coconut) Island is a narrow coral cay at the heart of the Torres Strait, positioned between major east-west sea routes and surrounded by rich fishing grounds. Despite its natural assets, outmigration and job scarcity remain pressing concerns. Locals aspire to own businesses, revive stalled tourism infrastructure and grow fisheries - but land tenure issues and limited on-island training support hold them back. A shared enterprise model and digital pathways for artists and tourism businesses could unlock inclusive growth. With investment in youth training and culturally tailored business education, Poruma is poised to shape a resilient, island-led economic future.

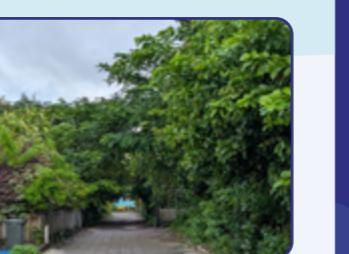
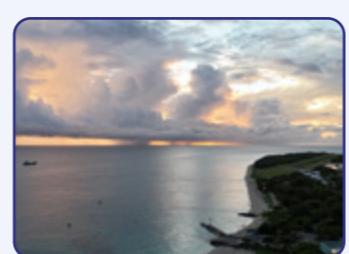
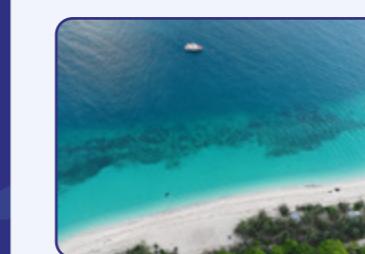
Community ECONOMIC PATHWAYS MAP

A Strategic Lens on Our Livelihood Pathways, Our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats



SWOT Key

- Strengths (Green)
- Weaknesses (Red)
- Opportunities (Blue)
- Threats (Orange)



Livelihood Capital Key

Human Capital	Social Capital
Natural Capital	Physical Capital
Financial Capital	Cultural Capital

Drivers FOR GROWTH

% of respondents said

92 %
Ailan Kastom was
(a) important or (b)
extremely important

86 %
There are not enough
jobs in community

What Infrastructure Improvements Would Help Community?

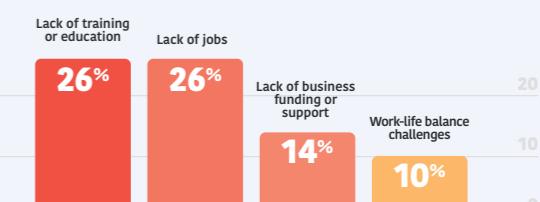


Community Sentiment Towards Tourism Is Largely Positive

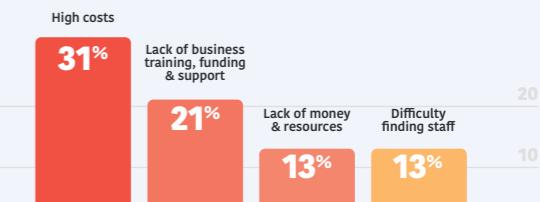


► Barriers & CHALLENGES ◀

What Are The Top For 4 Barriers For Work?



Top 4 Challenges faced by Small Business



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Island QUICKSTATS

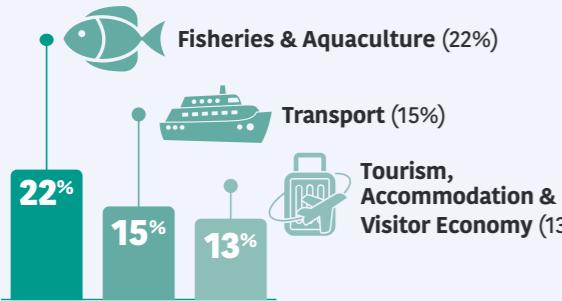
Population 283	Distance to Mainland Australia 140 km	Papua New Guinea
Distance to PNG 80 km	Nearest Hospital (Aus avg. 9.7km) 160 km	Masig Island
Workforce Participation Rate (Aus Avg. 67%) 58 %	Median weekly household income (Aus Avg. \$1770) \$ 949	Cape York
Average Age (Aus Avg. 38) 28 y/o	Life Expectancy (Aus avg. 83) 69 y/o	

► Future ASPIRATIONS ◀

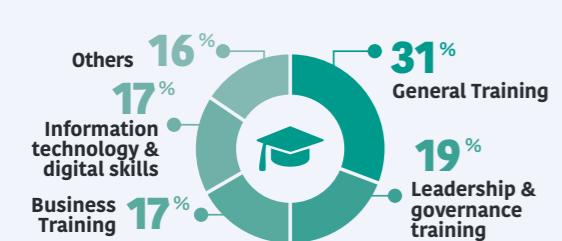
Top 3 Words that describe Community Aspiration

 AILAN-OWNED Businesses should be led & owned by Torres Strait Islanders.	 SUSTAINABLE Long-term growth that respects culture, the environment, & future generations	 INSPIRED New ideas that create opportunities and success in the region.
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Top 3 Most Important Industries To Community



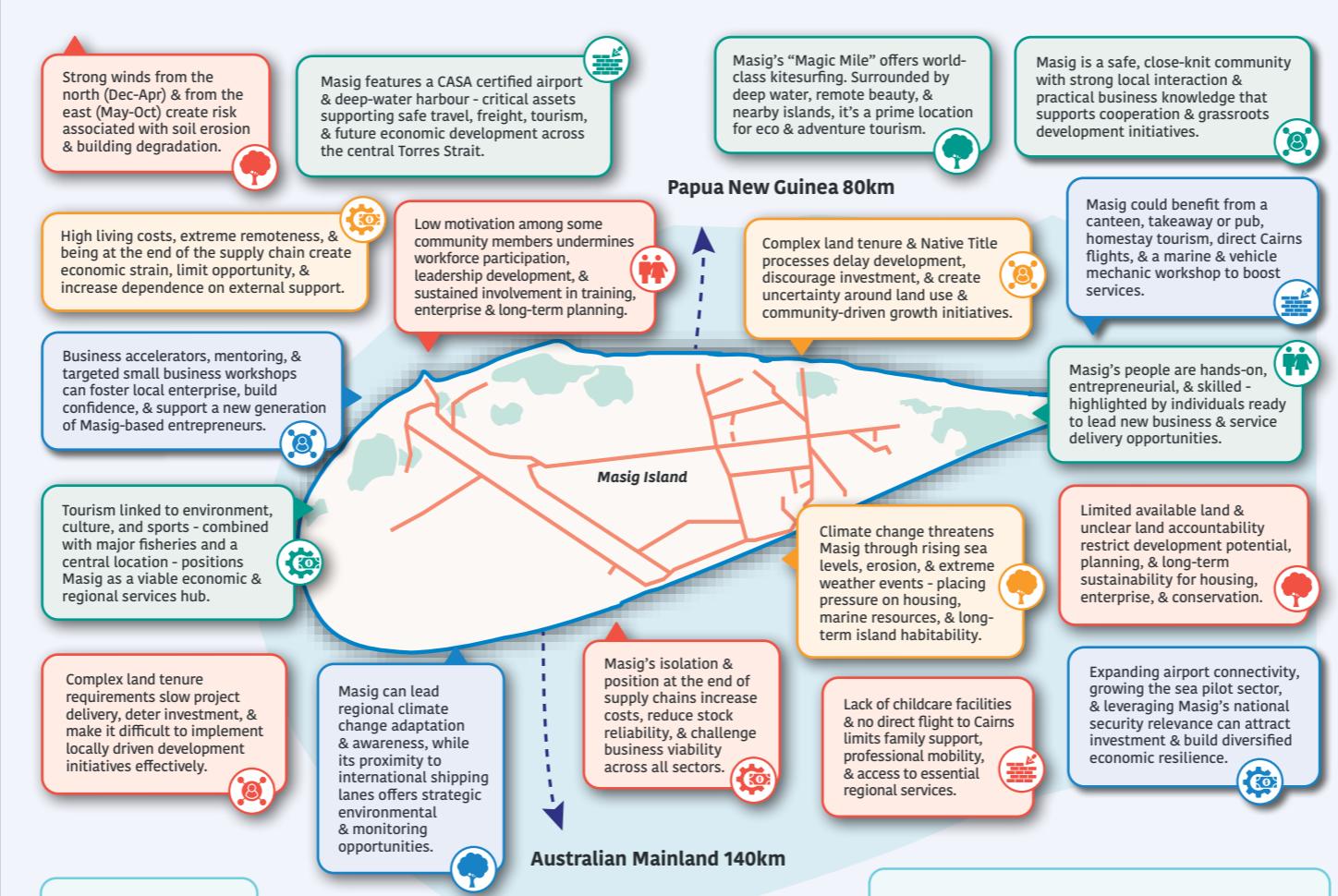
Training or education you would like?



Masig (Yorke) Island, a low-lying coral cay in the eastern Torres Strait, is strategically positioned near international shipping lanes and central to regional island clusters. Long known for its entrepreneurial spirit, Masig's community sees opportunity in fisheries, tourism, direct out-of-region flights and 100% Indigenous-owned enterprises. Climate change, cost of living and social fragmentation threaten progress - but locals remain practical, business-minded and hopeful. Strengthening community unity, investing in youth pathways, and leveraging Masig's maritime location could anchor future growth. With targeted support, Masig is ready to lead regionally through culture, commerce and connection.

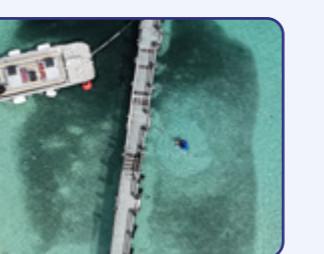
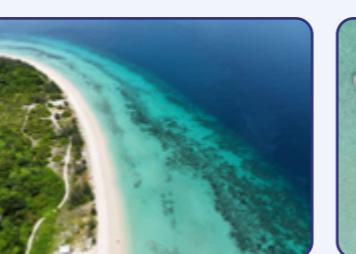
Community ECONOMIC PATHWAYS MAP

A Strategic Lens on Our Livelihood Pathways, Our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats



SWOT Key

- Strengths (Green)
- Weaknesses (Red)
- Opportunities (Blue)
- Threats (Orange)



Livelihood Capital Key

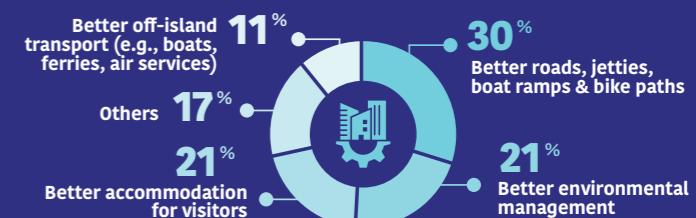
Human Capital	Social Capital
Natural Capital	Physical Capital
Financial Capital	Cultural Capital

Drivers FOR GROWTH

% of respondents said



What Infrastructure Improvements Would Help Community?

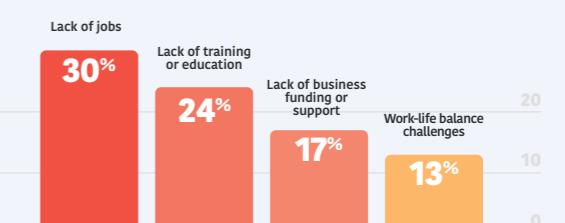


Community Sentiment Towards Tourism Is Largely Positive

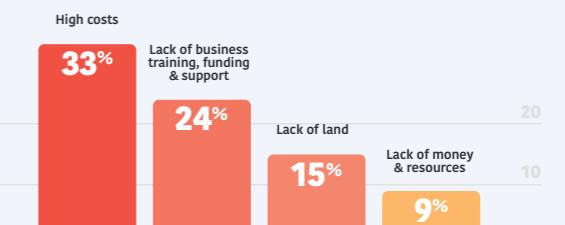


► Barriers & CHALLENGES ◀

What Are The Top For 4 Barriers For Work?



Top 4 Challenges faced by Small Business



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Island QUICKSTATS

Population	69	Distance to Mainland Australia	170 km	Papua New Guinea
Distance to PNG	60 km	Nearest Hospital (Aus avg. 9.7km)	190 km	Ugar Island
Workforce Participation Rate (Aus Avg. 67%)	52 %	Median weekly household income (Aus Avg. \$1770)	\$ 900	Cape York
Average Age (Aus Avg. 38)	29 y/o	Life Expectancy (Aus avg. 83)	69 y/o	

► Future ASPIRATIONS ◀

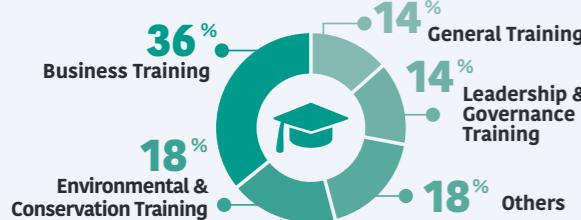
Top 3 Words that describe Community Aspiration

 SUPPORTED Access to funding, training & government support to help people succeed.	 AILAN-OWNED Businesses should be led & owned by Torres Strait Islanders.	 SUSTAINABLE Long-term growth that respects culture, the environment, & future generations
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Top 3 Most Important Industries To Community



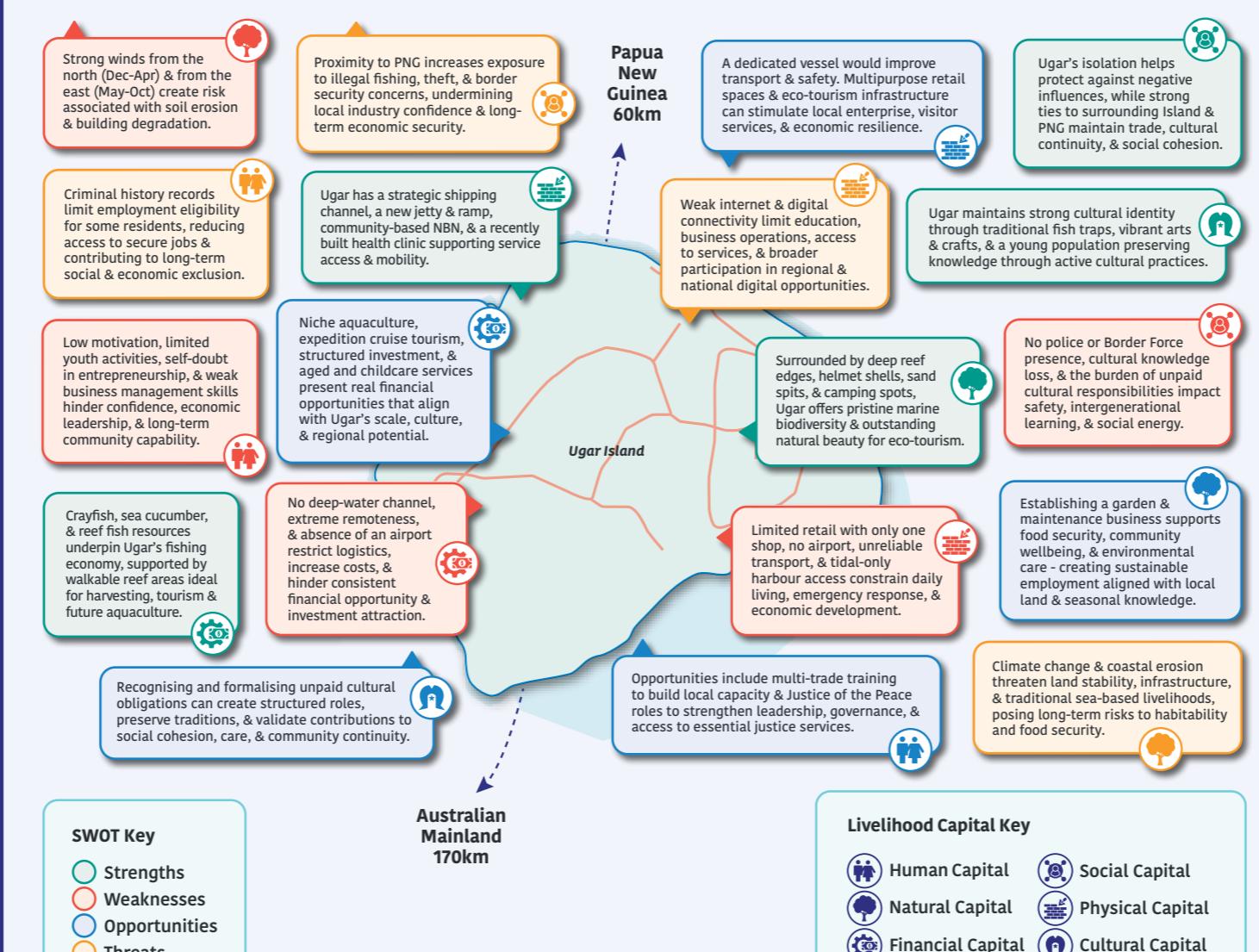
Training or education you would like?



Ugar (Stephen) Island, the Torres Strait's smallest and most isolated community, sits closer to Papua New Guinea than mainland Australia - without an airstrip and reliant on tidal maritime access, helicopter only aviation access. Infrequent freight, patchy internet and minimal services intensify disadvantage, but strategic location near international shipping lanes offers untapped opportunity. Fishing, sea cucumber harvesting and small-scale tourism could offer viable paths forward. Strong ties with Erub and Masig present collaboration potential. With targeted investment in transport, trade skills and microenterprise, Ugar's people can reclaim autonomy and shape sustainable futures despite geographic and economic constraints.

Community ECONOMIC PATHWAYS MAP

A Strategic Lens on Our Livelihood Pathways, Our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats



Drivers FOR GROWTH

% of respondents said

72 %
Ailan Kastom was
(a) important or (b)
extremely important

73 %
There are not enough
jobs in community

What Infrastructure Improvements Would Help Community?

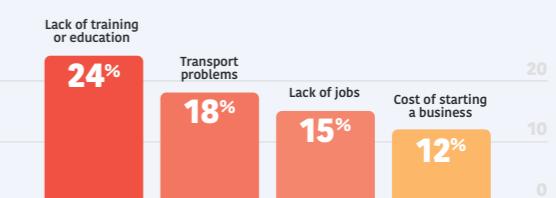


Community Sentiment Towards Tourism Is Largely Positive

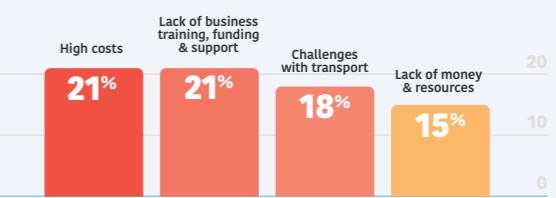


► Barriers & CHALLENGES ◀

What Are The Top For 4 Barriers For Work?



Top 4 Challenges faced by Small Business



Island QUICKSTATS

Population 326	Distance to Mainland Australia 180 km	Papua New Guinea
Distance to PNG 77 km	Nearest Hospital (Aus avg. 9.7km) 200 km	Erub Island
Workforce Participation Rate (Aus Avg. 67%) 60 %	Median weekly household income (Aus Avg. \$1770) \$ 974	
Average Age (Aus Avg. 38) 30 y/o	Life Expectancy (Aus avg. 83) 69 y/o	

► Future ASPIRATIONS ◀

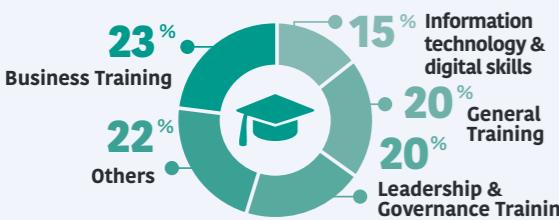
Top 3 Words that describe Community Aspiration

 SUSTAINABLE	 SUPPORTED	 PRIDE & CONFIDENCE
Long-term growth that respects culture, the environment, & future generations	Access to funding, training & government support to help people succeed.	Success that strengthens cultural identity & community

Top 3 Most Important Industries To Community



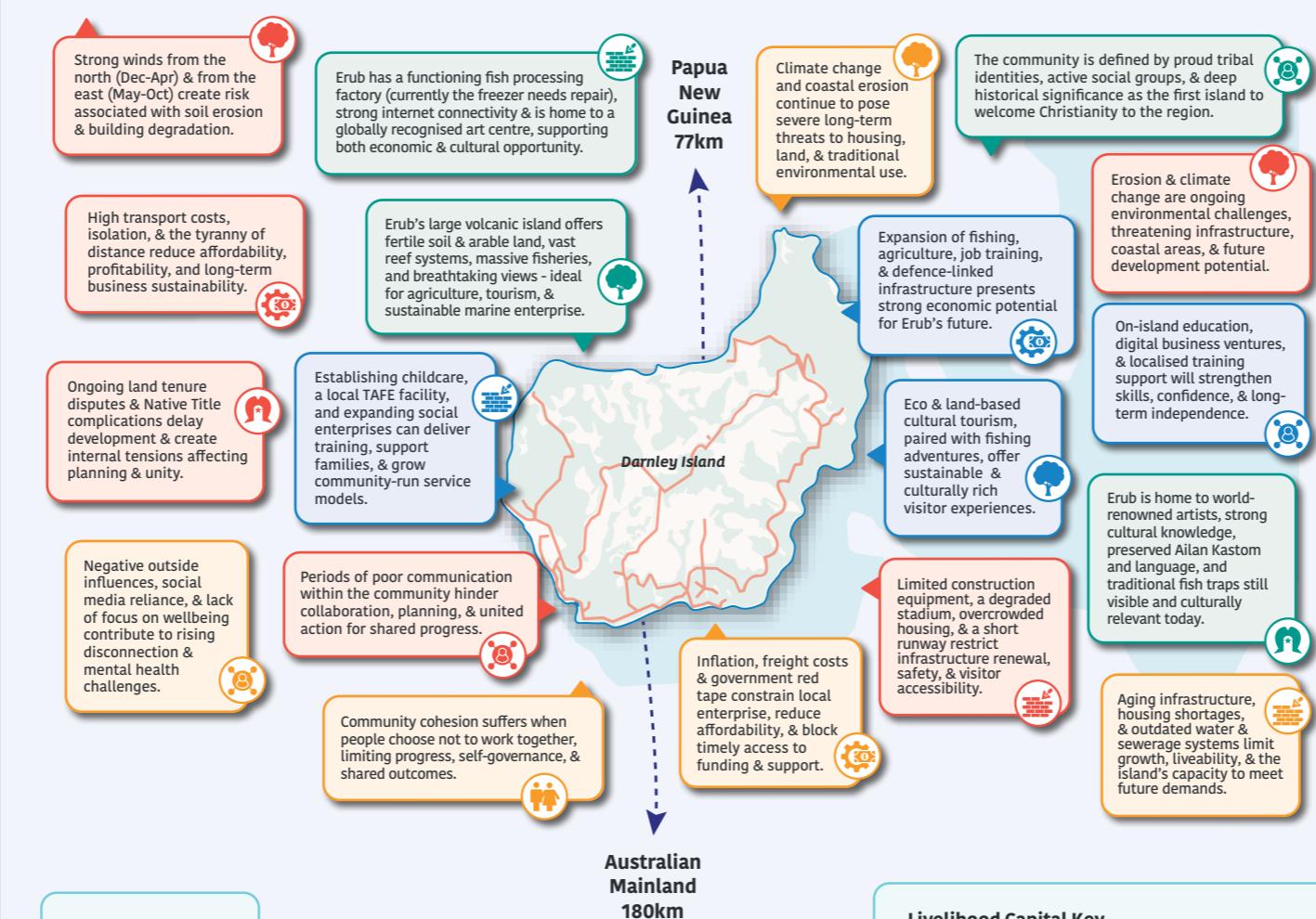
Training or education you would like?



Erub (Darnley) Island is one of the largest islands in the Torres Strait, formed from ancient volcanic rock and rising high above sea level - an uncommon advantage in the region. Its fertile soils support agricultural and aquaculture potential, while surrounding waters offer rich fisheries in mackerel, trout and crayfish. A disused fish factory presents a significant opportunity for restoration, alongside a strong push for local trade training. With better access to equipment, faster land tenure processes and youth transition planning, Erub could emerge as a leader in sustainable, island-based economic development.

Community ECONOMIC PATHWAYS MAP

A Strategic Lens on Our Livelihood Pathways, Our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats

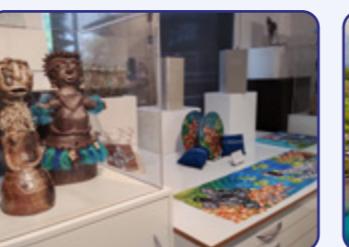


SWOT Key

- Strengths (Green)
- Weaknesses (Red)
- Opportunities (Blue)
- Threats (Orange)

Livelihood Capital Key

- Human Capital (Person icon)
- Social Capital (Group icon)
- Natural Capital (Tree icon)
- Physical Capital (Building icon)
- Financial Capital (Dollar icon)
- Cultural Capital (Trophy icon)



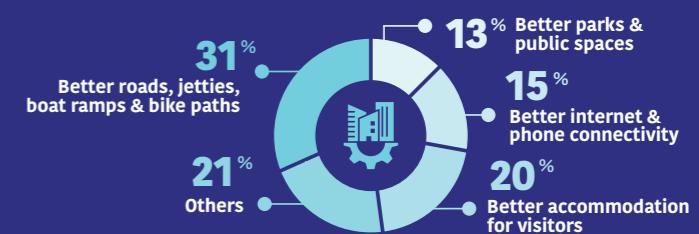
Drivers FOR GROWTH

% of respondents said

97 %
Ailan Kastom was (a) important or (b) extremely important

91 %
There are not enough jobs in community

What Infrastructure Improvements Would Help Community?

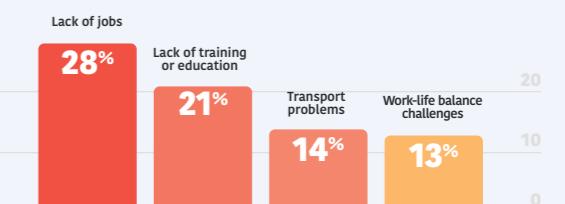


Community Sentiment Towards Tourism:

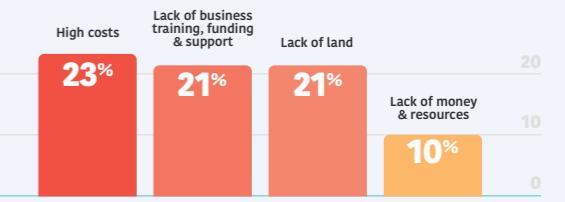


► Barriers & CHALLENGES ◀

What Are The Top 4 Barriers For Work?



Top 4 Challenges faced by Small Business



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Island QUICKSTATS

Population 406	Distance to Mainland Australia 180 km	Papua New Guinea
Distance to PNG 125 km	Nearest Hospital (Aus avg. 9.7km) 215 km	Mer Island
Workforce Participation Rate (Aus Avg. 67%) 59 %	Median weekly household income (Aus Avg. \$1,770) \$1,262	Cape York
Average Age (Aus Avg. 38) 27 y/o	Life Expectancy (Aus avg. 83) 69 y/o	

► Future ASPIRATIONS ◀

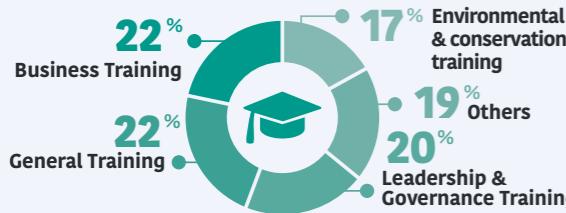
Top 3 Words that describe Community Aspiration

 AILAN-OWNED Businesses should be led & owned by Torres Strait Islanders.	 SUPPORTED Access to funding, training & government support to help people succeed.	 SELF-SUFFICIENT Creating opportunities where my community can live without relying on external support
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Top 3 Most Important Industries To Community



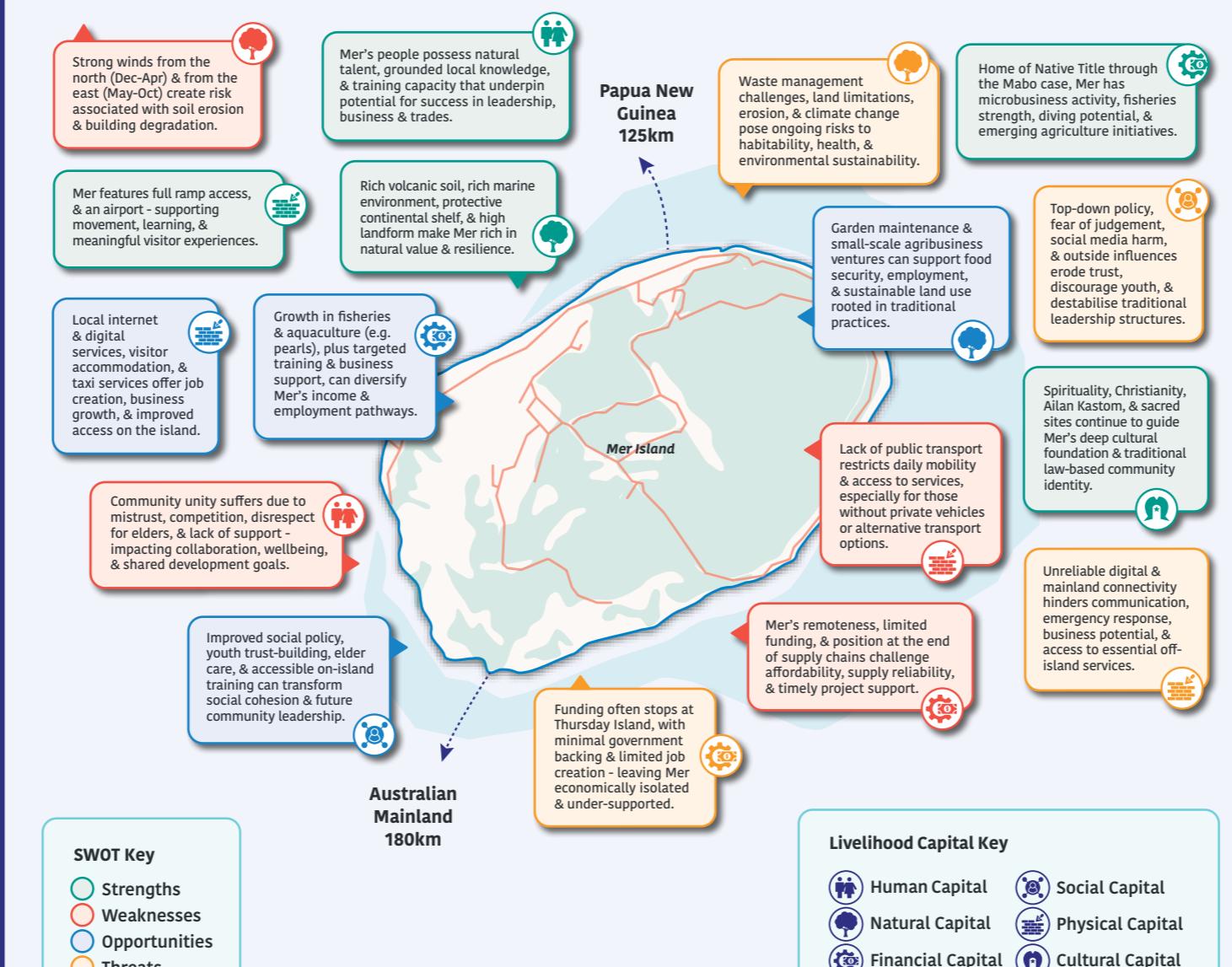
Training or education you would like?



Mer (Murray) Island, a volcanic high-ground outpost at the eastern edge of the Torres Strait and birthplace of Australia's Native Title precedent, sits only 15 km from the continental shelf's rich fishing grounds yet 200 km from the region's freight hub. While fertile soils and growing online ventures hint at agriculture and culturally safe tourism, freight delays, gatekeeper-driven policy and skills shortages constrain progress. Locals call for on-island youth training in trades, marine science and renewable energy, alongside investor links that bypass middlemen, to convert Mer's cultural capital into sustainable future prosperity.

Community ECONOMIC PATHWAYS MAP

A Strategic Lens on Our Livelihood Pathways, Our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats



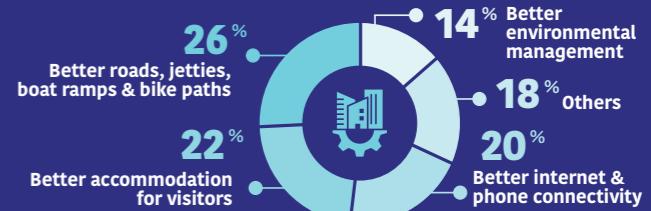
Drivers FOR GROWTH

% of respondents said

98%
Ailan Kastom was (a) important or (b) extremely important

98%
There are not enough jobs in community

What Infrastructure Improvements Would Help Community?

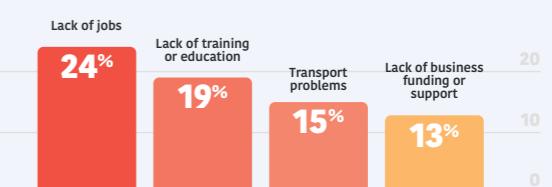


Community Sentiment Towards Tourism Is:



► Barriers & CHALLENGES ◀

What Are The Top For 4 Barriers For Work?



Top 4 Challenges faced by Small Business



Phase 2 Development Considerations

7.1. Common Themes across all Islands

Theme	Summary Insight
Locally Owned Business & Economic Autonomy	Strong desire across communities for increased local ownership and participation in key economic sectors.
Siloing Between Organisations & Community Groups	A varied level of perceived lack of coordination exists between the Commonwealth, State, Local Governments and Native Title bodies; similar issues are noted within communities at a social level.
Native Title & Land Tenure Confusion	Widespread uncertainty about development approvals, land access, and how to activate land for economic use.
Need for Place-Based Training and Education	Strong community support for on-island education and training programs tailored to local industries and livelihoods.
Business Accelerator Program Interest	Communities expressed demand for programs to scale existing businesses, building on the foundation of successful incubator program.
Ownership and Control of Regional Resources	Desire for greater local ownership and decision-making over land, sea, and economic assets, instead of external control or resource extraction.
Use of Social Housing for Business	Confusion around whether and how social housing can be used for private enterprise; inconsistent understanding of policy.
Island-Specific Fisheries Priorities	Fisheries are widely valued as a core industry, but preferences vary by island (e.g. crayfish, mackerel, crab).
Construction, Maintenance & Tourism Aspirations	Communities consistently identified these sectors as offering viable employment and economic independence.
Undervalued Public Service Employment	Limited awareness of the value, consistency and pathways within public sector jobs; opportunity for workforce strategy.
High Costs, Limited Jobs & Geographic Isolation	Universal concerns around freight costs, cost of living, and job scarcity due to isolation and landmass fragmentation.
Decentralisation of Government services from Inner Islands to the Outer Islands	Decentralising government services to outer islands strengthens access to jobs, empowers local communities, and drives sustainable economic growth through inclusive, community-centred development opportunities across the Torres Strait.



7.2. Community Appetite for Future Economic Development

The appetite for future economic development across the region is strong, rooted in a desire for self-determination, financial security and community well-being. Communities expressed readiness for change but made it clear that this must be delivered through locally led solutions, rather than externally imposed models.

There is an evident willingness to explore new industries, embrace innovation and invest in youth pathways and place-based training and education solutions, provided that traditional knowledge and community governance are respected. Many communities shared pride in their progress so far and are now seeking the tools, partnerships and investment required to take the next step in their economic journey.



7.3. Youth Strategy

The engagement process revealed a shared concern across all islands regarding youth disengagement from education, employment and cultural identity. However, it also revealed enormous potential. Young people want to be involved, lead initiatives and build meaningful futures in their home communities but require targeted support to get there. A youth strategy must focus on trade training, entrepreneurship, creative industries, digital literacy and leadership development. More importantly, it must be designed in partnership with young people themselves. The region's youth are not just a future audience - they are central players in building a resilient Torres Strait economy now.

7.4. Industry Aspirations & Emerging Trends

Fisheries, construction, tourism and cultural enterprises continue to be targeted as future industries across the region. These include interest in digital platforms, online sales, creative services, aquaculture, eco-tourism and niche logistics solutions (such as local taxi services). Communities also see potential in food security initiatives, such as community freezers and local family-to-family agriculture. Inter-island and intra-island transport, accommodation and localised care services (for the aged, people with disabilities, and early childhood) are identified as critical gaps with strong business potential. Industry aspirations are not limited by ambition but by access to capital, training and partnerships, highlighting the need for targeted support to unlock these emerging trends.

“

We are over
standing in one spot.

Mabuiag Island |
Community Member





8.1. Community-Led Planning Considerations

Community voices have clearly articulated the importance of locally driven development. Across the region, several key planning priorities have emerged:

Community feedback has consistently emphasised the importance of local leadership and island-specific direction. The following priorities should directly inform the development of the Economic Strategic Action Plan (Phase 2):

- ✓ **Local economic champions:** Identifying and resourcing community members to lead and facilitate ongoing planning and feedback.
- ✓ **Skills development:** Training in planning, enterprise, data literacy and economic strategy will enable meaningful participation.
- ✓ **Accessible communication tools:** Materials and engagement methods should be culturally appropriate, language-inclusive and user-friendly.
- ✓ **Respect for cultural governance:** Planning processes must embed Ailan Kastom and uphold local protocols in all engagements.

8.2. Engagement and Capacity-Building Requirements

To effectively co-design the Strategic Economic Action Plan, communities will need support through:

- » **Local economic champions:** Identifying and resourcing community members to lead and facilitate ongoing planning and feedback.
- » **Skills development:** Training in planning, enterprise, data literacy and economic strategy will enable meaningful participation.
- » **Accessible communication tools:** Materials and engagement methods should be culturally appropriate, language-inclusive and user-friendly.
- » **Respect for cultural governance:** Planning processes must embed Ailan Kastom and uphold local protocols in all engagements.

This investment in capacity is essential to shift from consultation to co-design.



8.3. Preliminary Considerations for Phase 2

Phase 2 will produce a Strategic Economic Action Plan that translates community priorities into clear, long-term economic goals and pathways. Early-stage considerations include:

Community-industry alignment: Engaging with key industry stakeholders early in Phase 2 to test, validate and refine community aspirations against what is realistically deliverable, scalable, or can be enabled on-island.

Island-level economic roadmaps: Drafting place-based action plans that reflect each community's vision, readiness, and capacity.

Project scoping and feasibility: Identifying and prioritising opportunities based on viability, investment potential, and resource requirements.

Evidence and mapping: Using data gathered during Phase 1 to highlight current infrastructure, service gaps, workforce assets, and regulatory considerations.

Funding and partnership pathways: Ensuring project ideas are matched with relevant funding sources and supported by credible delivery partners.

Ongoing governance and validation: Embedding community oversight into plan development, ensuring momentum is maintained and outcomes remain community led.

This approach ensures the Strategic Economic Action Plan is both visionary and implementable, grounded in local priorities but sharpened through external engagement and practical assessment.

Conclusion

9.1. Key Enablers

The following enablers have emerged from early engagement and consultation. While promising, they are preliminary and require further investigation, cross-checking and development in Phase 2:

- ➡ **Community Leadership**
Local ownership is widely supported but governance pathways and leadership structures need further clarity.
- ➡ **Policy & Regulatory Clarity**
Concerns around land tenure, social housing use and approvals must be further unpacked in coordination with relevant agencies.
- ➡ **Strong Partnerships**
Early feedback suggests the need for better alignment between key bodies, which will require further engagement (and potential partnering) in Phase 2. The lead Commonwealth agency (Torres Strait Regional Authority) and the Peak Native title body (Gur A Baradharaw Kod Torres Strait Sea and Land Council) are central to future success.
- ➡ **Capacity & Capability Building**
Opportunities for skills growth have been raised but must be matched with existing programs, funding pathways and delivery partners.

9.2. Key Strategies

The following strategic themes reflect community insights and early ideas that emerged through Phase 1. Each will require co-design, feasibility testing and alignment with broader local strategies during Phase 2:

- » **Island-By-Island Action Planning:** A localised approach was strongly supported but requires a consistent framework and delivery model
- » **Enterprise Growth Pathways:** Interest in both incubator and accelerator models was high but requires deeper scoping and sector-specific alignment
- » **Workforce Readiness:** Training ideas must be cross-checked with actual demand, delivery capacity and existing investment
- » **Construction, Fisheries, Public Sector & Tourism Leadership:** These sectors offer strong potential but require detailed market testing, infrastructure review and governance planning
- » **Funding & Investment Models:** Preliminary ideas around pooled investment and philanthropic partnerships will be explored further in the next phase
- » **Data-Informed Planning:** Community interest in tracking and visibility of outcomes must be supported by appropriate digital tools and data literacy programs

9.3. Next Steps For A Community-Led Economic Development Plan

This report delivers Phase 1 – The “What”, which is now complete. Phase 1 focused on understanding community perspectives across all 15 outer islands through consultation and engagement. The outcome is a clear, community-led foundation that identifies priorities, aspirations and focus areas for economic development.



Transition 1-2: Focus on diversity and inclusion, while recognising the uniqueness of each island.

This groundbreaking journey towards a first-of-its-kind strategy now continues through the following phases:

- » **Phase 2 – The “How”:** Development of an ED Strategic Action Plan with committed investment partners.
Development of a Strategic Economic Development Action Plan, underpinned by committed investment partners. This phase translates aspirations into practical, fundable actions that can be tested and delivered.

Transition 2-3 : Focus on learning together, building shared skills and collective capacity.

- » **Phase 3 – The “Where”:** Development of a Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.
Development of a Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. This framework will track progress, measure outcomes, and ensure accountability while supporting a shared culture of learning and adaptation across the Torres Strait.

Transition 3-4: Focus on place-based action, with island-by-island priorities guiding pilot projects, low-hanging fruit initiatives, and early funded projects.

- » **Phase 4 – The “When”:** Development of Island-level ED Planning & Implementation Models through a community entity.
Development of Island-level Economic Development Planning and Implementation Models through community entities. This phase ensures that each island's unique strengths and opportunities are directly reflected in tailored strategies and practical initiatives, including pilot projects and early funded activities.

Transition 4-5: Focus on place-based action, with island-by-island priorities guiding pilot projects, low-hanging fruit initiatives, and early funded projects.

- » **Phase 5 – The “Now”:** Development of a Regional Entity that can support ongoing governance and management.
Development of a Regional Entity that can support ongoing governance and management. This stage establishes the long-term structure needed to sustain economic development efforts, coordinate partnerships, and ensure genuine community control and Ailan-owned leadership into the future.
This final stage establishes the long-term structure to oversee economic development across the region, ensuring that planning, delivery, and accountability remain community-led, transparent, and sustainable.

Conclusion

Phase 1 has laid a strong foundation for a community-led economic future in the Torres Strait. The insights and ideas gathered are rich, diverse, and full of promise, but must be understood as preliminary inputs, not final plans.

Construction, fisheries, and the public sector have already been identified as established and significant economic drivers in the region. Tourism and Arts and Culture while not yet on the same scale, are emerging as a growing industry with clear potential to complement these existing strengths.

Phase 2 will focus on validating, refining and translating these ideas into a clear Strategic Economic Action Plan. This will involve technical assessments, industry engagement, policy clarification, and deeper collaboration with communities to ensure outcomes are not only ambitious but also practical, deliverable, and truly grounded in island priorities.

The journey to economic self-determination has begun, and the next phase will be critical in turning vision into action.



Torres Strait Island
REGIONAL COUNCIL

Thank You

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Phase 1

AUGUST

2025

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