



ORDINARY MEETING

28 JANUARY 2026

Mayoral Minute
Secretariat to complete

MAYORAL MINUTE – ADDITIONAL ITEM FOR JANUARY 2026 ORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING AGENDA

[Business the Mayor wishes to have considered at the meeting without notice under Paragraph 4.1 of the TSIRC Standing Orders]

Background:

Council issued a media release on 27 January 2026 ([Attachment 1](#)) in response to recent media articles published in *The Cairns Post* and ABC News media in January 2026 (see [Attachments 2–4](#)) in relation to illegal fishing activities and ongoing border security issues.

The TSIRC media release demands urgent answers and action on escalating illegal foreign fishing and border breaches.

The Mayor has requested Mr T.J. Oberleuer (Treaty Liaison Officer, Torres Strait Treaty Liaison Office) to coordinate an urgent meeting between Council and relevant Federal and State Government Departments and Agency representatives for the region to brief Council around these matters.

Arrangements have been made for this discussion to take place at the January 2026 Ordinary Council Meeting under Closed Business at 2.30pm.

The agenda for this meeting was officially published prior to this change and Council is now required to formally endorse an amendment to the published agenda.

MAYORAL RECOMMENDATION:

That the following motion be endorsed by Council:

Council agrees to an amendment to the published agenda for the January 2026 Ordinary Council Meeting to include a discussion in Closed Business at 2.30pm between Council, the Treaty Liaison Officer and relevant Federal and State Government Departments and Agency representatives for the region to brief Council on illegal fishing activities and ongoing border security issues.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. TSIRC Media Release dated 27 January 2026
2. ABC News media article dated 22 January 2026
3. *The Cairns Post* media article dated 25 January 2026
4. *The Cairns Post* media article dated 27 January 2026



MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release | 27 January 2026

Torres Strait Island Regional Council demands urgent answers and action on escalating illegal foreign fishing and border breaches

Thursday Island / Torres Strait — Torres Strait Island Regional Council (TSIRC) condemns the escalating reports of suspected illegal foreign fishing incursions in Torres Strait waters and is calling for immediate, coordinated action to protect Island communities, sea Country, local livelihoods and Australia's northern border.

TSIRC Mayor Cr Phillemon Mosby said there was a deep irony in celebrating Australia Day over the recent long weekend while the lived reality of Torres Strait communities — a marginalised region at the frontline of Australia's northern border — continues to be overlooked.

"It's hard to ignore the irony of national celebration while our people are left exposed and too often forgotten. The Torres Strait should not be an afterthought for governments — we deserve the same consideration, protection and respect as anywhere else in Australia," Mayor Mosby said.

Mayor Mosby stated that more communities are noticing vessels entering Australian waters, sometimes near the shore, which has left families feeling afraid and upset due to what they perceive as inconsistent deterrence efforts and poor communication.

"These are not just waters on a map — this is our sea Country, our livelihood, our culture, and our responsibility to protect for future generations," Mayor Mosby said.

"When suspected foreign vessels enter our waters, it creates real fear — fear for the safety of our hunters and fishers, fear for families, and fear of what else could be happening in our region."

Mayor Mosby said TSIRC has worked for years under the Council's "Blue Security and Safe Region" framework, but the recent scale and frequency of reported incidents raise serious questions about prevention, coordination and accountability.

TSIRC needs answers

On behalf of Council, Mayor Mosby said TSIRC is seeking clear, timely answers from the responsible agencies, including:

- Why are border breaches occurring at this magnitude and frequency?
- What has happened to effective Torres Strait joint border control and operational coordination?
- What is being done now to prevent and deter future incursions?
- How will the responsible law enforcement agency report incidents to TSIRC and communities in a timely and consistent way?
- Why are unauthorised arrivals and vessels left on already vulnerable islands with minimal local security and protection measures?



- How will agencies work with Council and regional leadership so our people, islands, resources and region feel safe and protected?

“Our communities should not be left to feel like they are the first line of defense,” Mayor Mosby said.

“We need stronger protection measures that prevent illegal activity from entering Torres Strait waters in the first place — not explanations after the fact.”

What TSIRC is demanding

TSIRC is calling for urgent, visible and sustained action, including:

- The relevant Minister to travel to the Torres Strait to meet with TSIRC and regional leadership.
- A review of current law enforcement capability and arrangements, including stronger security and patrol measures.
- The Saibai facility to be adequately resourced and staffed to meet operational demands.
- Local officers to be properly resourced and appropriately qualified to support lawful detention and arrest processes where required.
- Patrol boats to be consistently active across Torres Strait waters, including known incursion hotspots.
- Reliable connectivity across the Torres Strait, to support safety, coordination and reporting.
- A reliable confidential reporting system (software/app-based) for communities and leadership to report incursions and receive updates.

“The Torres Strait is sovereign Australian territory. Our people deserve to feel safe, heard, and protected,” Mayor Mosby said.

“We’re calling for a strong, visible and sustained response that matches the seriousness of what’s happening.”

Council action and next steps

Mayor Mosby said these concerns were raised during the recent Governor-General visit to Masig Island, reflecting the seriousness of community sentiment across the region.

TSIRC has invited Australian Border Force (ABF), DFAT, ADP and Queensland Police Service (QPS) to attend the Council’s Ordinary Meeting tomorrow (28 January 2026) to address these issues directly, including prevention measures, operational response arrangements, and improvements to communication and reporting.

ENDS

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NEWS

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Second illegal foreign fishing boat spotted in Torres Strait waters

By **Adam Stephen, Christopher Testa and Chris Calcino**

ABC Far North Illegal Fishing

Thu 22 Jan 2026 at 4:53pm



Fishermen could be seen aboard the boat in drone footage shot by a Torres Strait man. (*Supplied: Rod Colquhoun*)

In short:

A Torres Strait man has used a drone to capture footage of a foreign fishing vessel illegally in the Australian Exclusive Economic Zone.

It is the second foreign fishing boat spotted in Queensland's northern waters in about a week.

What's next?

Residents are calling into question the integrity of Australia's borders as boats come within eyeshot of the shore.

A second foreign fishing boat has been spotted in Australia's northern waters, just days after Australian Border Force (ABF) officials intercepted a boat that almost reached the mainland.

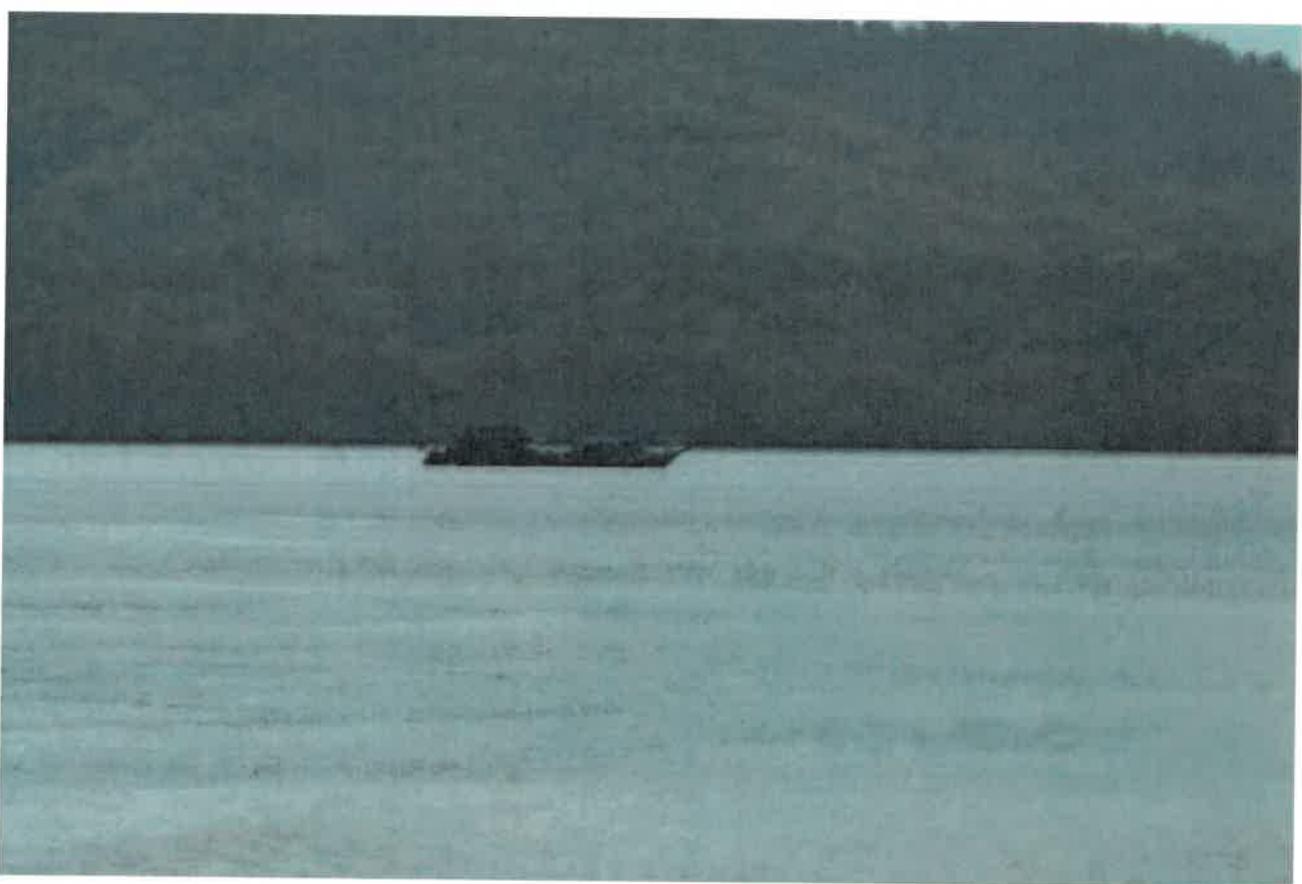
Residents of Prince of Wales Island in the Torres Strait reported the latest incursion to ABF yesterday.

Rod Colquhoun took pictures of the boat with a drone from Prince of Wales Island, about 19 kilometres south of Thursday Island.

"A couple of blokes in the back were hiding their faces but I got shots of all of them up close," he said.

"They wouldn't have known where the drone came from.

"I flew alongside them for a couple of minutes and then flew her back in because a big storm hit."



This fishing boat was spotted close to the shore of Prince of Wales Island in the Torres Strait. (Supplied: Rod Colquhoun)

Mr Colquhoun said surveillance aircraft had been flying above the southern Torres Strait for much of the past week but he did not believe the

border was secure.

"Just the fact there's boats getting in under the radar is a worry; doesn't matter what they've got on board," he said.

"They're getting through the net."

Mr Colquhoun said he did not see the men fishing but there were nets on the boat.

He believed they had landed on the island, which was surrounded by thick mangroves.

"You can hide anything in there," he said.

"From where I am, they're probably about half a [kilometre] in the mangroves from where my house is along the beach there, so they've been stashed in there for a few days, I would say."

'Right there in front of me'

The boat's arrival in the Torres Strait comes about a week after an ABF patrol boat and helicopter intercepted an Indonesian fishing boat in waters off Roko Island.

Officers seized fishing equipment from that boat, along with 200 kilograms of salt used to preserve catch.

Authorities said last week's interception occurred before the Indonesian crew had a chance to fish.

However, that boat made it close enough to the Cape York mainland for locals to take clear photographs of it just offshore at Roonga Point.



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Mr Colquohun's son, Jack, was among those who photographed last week's boat from near Possession Island.

Prince of Wales Island is where ABF's operations in the Torres Strait are headquartered.

ABF officials on Thursday Island have been relocating from their long-standing base at HM Customs House this month, after its lease was not renewed.

"The ABF is working closely with relevant Australian government agencies to ensure there is no disruption to our service to the community and operations in the Torres Strait during the period of transition," an ABF spokesman said.

"While it is not appropriate to respond through the media to specific operational details that result from these reports, Maritime Border Command, in partnership with Australian Fisheries Management Authority, continues to employ a range of enforcement options to detect and deter illegal foreign fishing in Australian waters.

"The community can be assured every report of suspected illegal fishing is taken seriously."

Mr Colquhoun was critical of the time it took for a physical response from authorities.

"When you report something, you want to hear something done, hey?" Mr Colquhoun said.

"They were right there in front of me and border force knew from seven o'clock this morning."



Locals say the boat has been near Prince of Wales Island for at least two days. (*Supplied: Rod Colquhoun*)

National security and sovereign risk

Queensland Seafood Industry Association chief executive David Bobberman argued it should be ABF — not citizens on the mainland — who spotted illegal incursions.

"If these fishing vessels can come within a hundred metres of our borders undetected, what does it say about our national security and our sovereign risk?" he asked.

Mr Bobberman said a reduction in the Queensland commercial fishing fleet due to increased fisheries regulation also meant less oversight in the Torres Strait.

"The fishing industry used to provide what I would call citizen eyes on the water," he said.

"We're not there at the moment, so that's giving these poachers the ability to come in and take our lovely fish."



Another Indonesian fishing boat was intercepted by the Australian Border Force just over a week ago. (Supplied: Claire Watson)

University of Queensland marine scientist Leslie Roberson, an expert on seafood trade and fisheries management, said patrolling Australia's northern waters was tricky due to their remoteness.

"We know there are a lot of incursions and there have been for a long time," she said.

Dr Roberson said shark fins and beche-de-mer sea cucumber, also known as trepang, were the typical high-value species targeted by illegal Indonesian fishing crews.

She said the two latest sightings proved the importance of having a citizen-led "neighbourhood watch" on the waters.



Last week's illegal fishing boat off Cape York was escorted out of the Australian Exclusive Economic Zone by the ABF. (Supplied: Claire Watson)

"These boats might have not been apprehended without them," she said.

It is understood the ABF intercepted 298 illegal foreign fishing vessels in Australian waters during the 2024–25 financial year.

An ABF spokesperson said fixed-wing aerial surveillance had improved markedly and was on track to deliver the full contracted 15,000 flying hours per year in 2025–26.

"The total number of aerial surveillance (fixed wing and rotary wing combined) flight hours completed in 2024–25 was 14,755 hours," the spokesperson said.

"This is 17.3 per cent higher compared to ... flight hours completed in 2023–24 (12,579 hours)."

Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke has been contacted for comment.

This week, opposition senator Susan McDonald said the ABF needed more funding to mount extra surveillance flights on the northern border.

"We have seen that Indonesian vessels are coming in, they're doing it in daylight, they're waving at observers because they absolutely don't think they are under risk from surveillance aircraft," she said.

Posted Thu 22 Jan 2026 at 4:53pm, updated Fri 23 Jan 2026 at 12:34pm

January 25, 2026 - 8:49PM

The Cairns Post

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Eight more illegal fishing boats spotted in Torres Strait



Eight more illegal fishing boats spotted in Torres Strait

Multiple more suspected illegal fishing...

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At least eight suspected illegal fishing boats anchored off a Queensland Island have been captured in shocking new footage, with residents calling for urgent measures to secure Australia's northern border.

A Boigu Island local, travelling home from Mabuiag Island on Friday captured the video of multiple boats anchored on the western side of Buru Island.

It is understood several more boats were spotted during the charter flight before filming commenced.

The remote, uninhabited reef island lies more than 120kms off the Australian coast and about 40kms from the Papua New Guinea mainland.

The footage comes just hours before Indonesian fishers beached their boat in broad daylight on a separate Torres Strait island.

A suspected illegal fishing boat has made land near homes on Mabuiag Island, with distressed residents saying they have spotted "at least a dozen" more boats they believe are currently poaching in Australian waters.



01:19

Foreign illegal fishers caught in Torres Strait

A suspected illegal fishing vessel was...

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Two fishers, understood to have been from Indonesia, were spotted on their beached boat on the island on Saturday morning, the latest in a “brazen” string of illegal fishers entering North Australia’s border with ease.



The suspected illegal fishing vessel is understood to have been intercepted by an Australian Border Force vessel and told to anchor offshore from Mabuiag Island this weekend. Picture: Dave Yellub.



Once left by Border Force, the vessel beached itself Mabuiag Island. Picture: Dave Yellub. Resident Dave Yellub said the boat came ashore in broad daylight outside his home.

"I've seen these illegal fishing vessels first-hand in our waters," he said.

"It's extremely concerning these boats often come without warning, sometimes very close to our homes, and it leaves the community feeling unsafe and overlooked.

"People here rely on the sea for food, culture, and our way of life, and seeing outsiders enter illegally threatens not only our safety but also our cultural practices and livelihoods.

"I've seen illegal boats before, but it's definitely worse now — they seem more frequent and more brazen than in the past."



A suspected illegal fishing vessel beached itself on Maiburg Island on Saturday in the latest incursion of foreign fishing vessels into the Torres Strait. Picture: Dave Yellub

Know more about this story? Contact me at timothy.little@news.com.au

It is understood Border Force officials intercepted the vessel and instructed it to remain anchored just offshore on Saturday while it dealt with a nearby emergency, but the fishers later beached the boats.

Island residents said they then told the fishers to return back to the water.



A number of suspected illegal fishing vessels have been spotted across the Torres Strait in the past two weeks leaving residents on edge about how Australia's northern border can be accessed so frequently. Pictures: supplied.

This incursion is one of many suspected illegal vessels spotted across the Torres Strait since mid-January.

But the boats aren't just flirting with Australia's border and have been spotted more than 100km inside it, according to Punsand Bay resident Jack Colquhoun.

Mr Colquhoun lives at the very tip of mainland Australia and said his family saw multiple vessels a "few hundred metres" from shore within the past two weeks.

"We'd heard reports that there was potentially a few boats hanging around and then dad went down the beach and noticed this vessel ... there's another one."

"It's not as if they just inside Australian waters. They're taking the piss here."

"It's very clear that there's like a huge amount of boats in the Torres Straits at the moment, you'd be safe to say there's at least a dozen."



Torres Strait is well known for its bountiful sea cucumber, crayfish and fin fish fisheries.

Pictures: supplied.

Residents say they are shocked by the poachers' brazen attitudes, with fishers travelling in broad daylight, waving at cameras and not bothering to obscure their ship's anchorage.

Mr Colquhoun said current deterrents weren't working.

"If the roles were reversed and you went over to Indonesia for a week with a dozen of your mates' boats, there would be different consequences," he said.

"At the moment ... it's not even a slap on the wrist, if anything, they're getting a bloody gold star and a full tank of fuel."

"The boats should be getting destroyed straightaway ... it's such a sensitive part of Australia up here. It's a free-for-all."

Leichhardt MP Matt Smith said he was "keenly aware" of the issue, but would not outline if there were any plans to assist in deploying additional resources to the area.

"I'm keenly aware of the incursion issues in the Torres Strait," he said.

"I'm always keen to advocate for the region and raise awareness of the issues that arise in the Torres Strait."

"While operations are ongoing, I cannot comment further."

A spokesman for the Department of Home Affairs said authorities were "aware" of the issue but also couldn't comment while operations were ongoing.

"The Australian Border Force, through Maritime Border Command, is aware of the reporting and (is) responding," he said.

"We appreciate and encourage the community to report any suspicious activity to Border Watch."



Residents are now calling on the federal government to ramp up surveillance in the area to avoid further incursions. Pictures: supplied.

Residents have called for urgent help to better protect the country's border.

Mr Yellub said wanted to see more patrols and eyes on the water.

"We need urgent government action: more patrols, increased funding, and a real, consistent on-the-ground presence to monitor and protect our waters," he said.

"These boats are becoming bold and obvious, which shows that current deterrents aren't working.

"The lack of effective action from the Australian government and Border Force needs to be acknowledged and addressed."

Australian Border Force was contacted independently of Department of Home Affairs however didn't respond before deadline.

‘Unacceptable’: Council slams border security over explosion of foreign boats

A fish organ worth thousands could be triggering an unprecedented surge of illegal fishing boats in Australian waters, leaving island communities “scared and fed up”.



[Tim Little](#)

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2 min read

January 27, 2026 - 6:00AM

The Cairns Post



Illegal fishing vessels have been spotted across the Torres Strait in the past two weeks leaving residents on edge about how Australia's northern border can be accessed so frequently. Pictures: supplied.

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A fish's swim bladder could be one reason for a recent explosion of foreign fishing vessels in the Torres Strait with island residents saying authorities could have addressed the growing issue “a long time ago”.

Since mid-January, at least 10 suspected Indonesian illegal fishing boats have been sighted across the Torres Strait, with recent arrivals exceeding anything many residents can recall. Originally believed to have been pursuing bêche-de-mer and reef fish, it is understood demand for black jewfish could be adding to the incursions.

Boigu Island local Salome Toby said residents had seen first hand the increasingly brazen attempts from illegal fishermen over the past two years.



Black jewfish swim bladder is a prized ingredient in some Asian cooking traditional medicine.
Picture: Fisheries Queensland.

“They should have done something about it a long time ago,” she said.
“Our waters are so full and rich of black jew fish ... they want the swim bladder.
“They used to park, they’ll anchor their boats on our waterlines right near our village ... they even used to come and buy big hooks and lead from the local shop.
“Now word has spread back to Irian Jaya (West Papua)... I’m guessing they’re thinking it’s we’ll just go in their waters to fish because nothing will be done.”

[Torres Strait residents demand urgent action as ‘brazen’ illegal fishers swarm region](#)

Ms Toby said fishers from West Papua and neighbouring villages were targeting the fish while separate buyers had also been spotted in faster “speed boats” to purchase the product.

Popular throughout South East Asian cuisine and traditional medicine, black jew fish swim bladder can fetch up to \$1000 per Kilo.



In 2021, Fisheries Queensland slashed commercial quota for black jewfish after a surge in demand. Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol officers with seized black jewfish bladders. Picture: Fisheries Queensland.

In 2021, Queensland fisheries slashed how many black jewfish could legally be caught in the state after a surge in demand saw commercial catches catapult from 20 to 140 tonnes in just 18 months.



The sort after product could fetch up to \$1000 per kilo on the black market. Picture: Fisheries Queensland.

Ms Toby said her community fished for subsistence and that residents were “scared” about what the fishermen could do.

“We don’t know what they’re capable of if they’re carrying guns or they’re doing drug runs in our waters.

“Our boys are hunters and they go out to catch food to provide for their family we don’t know what will happen if they go to the back and they run into them.

“We need protection on our islands because we’re in Australian waters … our Border Force has to be strong and put their foot down.”



An Australian Border Force agent looks towards the Western Province of Papua New Guinea from the foreshore on Boigu Island on March 25, 2021 in Boigu Island, Australia. Photo by Brook Mitchell.

Australian Border Force were contacted for comment.

In response to the recent arrivals, a Torres Shire Council spokesman said the issue was "unacceptable".

“This undetected travel through the Torres Strait is unacceptable especially considering the taxpayer investment in the region including the multi-million dollar “hi-tech” Saibai Facility installed to ensure the safety of our borders,” a spokesman said.

“It seems there is still a lack of urgency regarding communication and accountability to our region’s communities and leadership.

“We should not have to be informed through social media or by our community networks.” Mayor Elsie Seriat was contacted for comment but did not respond by deadline.