

Media Release No. 679

26 October 2015

Dance Strategy generates performance opportunities during the Torres Strait Treaty anniversary

Australia and Papua New Guinea have celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Torres Strait Treaty with dance performances by Bamaga's Naygayiw Gigi dance team in Port Moresby on October 8 2015.

The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) was pleased to support Naygayiw Gigi's participation in the celebrations through the *Torres Strait Dance Strategy*: supporting local dance teams to gain experience performing professionally throughout Australia and internationally.

The dance team, from the Northern Peninsula Area travelled as part of the Australian delegation participating in the celebrations, which were held in conjunction with the annual Joint Advisory Council meeting hosted by Papua New Guinea.

The dance team performed twice during the visit, at the treaty celebrations as well as at Caritas Technical Secondary School, and were very well received, according to the TSRA Chairperson, Joseph Elu.

Mr Joseph Elu said that even though the Torres Strait Treaty was signed 30 years ago, it remains extremely significant to the communities of the Torres Strait and Papua New Guinea (PNG).

"The Torres Strait Treaty was the first treaty to recognise the importance of protecting the traditional way of life, and livelihood of the traditional inhabitants of the Torres Strait and those in the area of coastal PNG, adjacent to the Torres Strait," Mr Elu said.

"Traditional inhabitants play a major role in the ongoing development of the Treaty provisions, and the day-to-day management of traditional visits and marine resources under the Treaty."

Naygayiw Gigi dance team coordinator, Leonora Adidi, said the treaty has allowed them to preserve, maintain and revitalise the culture of *Bamaga and Seisia Saibailgal* – the descendants of the seven clans of Saibai Island – in the Northern Peninsula Area (NPA) of Queensland.

"Traditional dance is the focal point of Naygayiw Gigi (meaning Northern Thunder) dance troupe's holistic approach to addressing the rapid decline of the Torres Strait and Saibailgal culture," Mrs Adidi said.

"Its aim is to preserve the strong dancing tradition and nurture a new generation of performers and cultural practitioners by utilising dances, stories and songs to promote, share and inform audiences locally, Australia-wide and internationally of the culture and history of Saibailgal."

Mr Elu said Naygayiw Gigi's strong cultural grounding and professional approach to performance were extremely impressive to audiences in Papua New Guinea and have set an exceptional standard for international performance.

"Naygayiw Gigi received very positive, national media coverage in Papua New Guinea," Mr Elu said.

"The team applied, and were selected through, the TSRA's *Torres Strait Dance Strategy* dedicated funding round for Torres Strait and NPA dance teams.

"Each year dance teams have the opportunity to apply for specific opportunities cultivated through the TSRA's Culture, Art and Heritage Programme."

This is the second international performance opportunity to come out of the Torres Strait Dance Strategy, following Purple Spider Dance Team's participation at the Henley Festival, UK in 2012.

For more information on the Torres Strait Dance Strategy, contact TSRA Acting Cultural Development Officer, Regina Turner on 07 40 690 700.

ENDS

TSRA Media Contact – Bruce Nelson telephone 04 2340 3449