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TSRA CHAIRMAN CALLS ON AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT TO HONOUR SEA WALL FUNDING

The Torres Strait's most vulnerable communities may miss out on essential coastal protection works following an announcement that Regional Development Australia Fund (RDAF) funding not committed under contract to build or replace sea walls may no longer be available following the change of Australian government.

The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) Chairman, Mr Joseph Elu, said an existing funding agreement of \$3.2 million that was signed in June 2012 between the TSRA and the Torres Strait Island Regional Council (TSIRC) would ensure that essential preliminary design and planning works on Saibai, Boigu, Iama, Poruma, Masig and Warraber Islands could be carried out

"This funding is for planning and clearly will not be sufficient to see the entire project completed," Mr Elu said.

"The Torres Strait Coastal Protection Works (Seawalls) project has clear long-term regional benefits and the capacity to protect communities from annual tidal inundation and significant coastal erosion adjacent to key community assets and infrastructure.

"However, without the full commitments for further funding from both the Australian and Queensland Governments being ratified through agreements, our communities are at continued risk of destruction by rising sea levels."

Funding of up to \$12 million was announced by the Australian Government in 2012 to help fund coastal protection works in the Torres Strait.

This funding announcement included a \$5 million grant to the Torres Strait Island Regional Council from the RDAF and up to \$7 million in additional Australian government funding.

This commitment was made on the condition that it was matched by the Queensland Government.

In January 2013, the Queensland Government matched the contribution, announcing that \$12 million would be made available from the \$13.2 million State Government contribution to the Torres Strait Major Infrastructure Program.

"Given the timing of Seawalls funding announcements by respective Governments, the TSIRC has undertaken detailed planning and resolved a number of Native Title and design issues to ensure that the logistically complex \$26.2 million seawalls projects can be delivered.

“However, the TSRA understands that, although planning work and designs are well advanced, final funding agreements for the outstanding \$23 million commitments required to deliver the seawalls have not yet been fully ratified,” Mr Elu said.

“The TSRA moved swiftly and engaged in formal funding agreements with Council with all of the funds that it had control over.

“I strongly encourage all levels of government, regardless of politics to honour all funding commitments to protect our people from coastal inundation and provide critical environmental health infrastructure to ensure the health of our communities in the Torres Strait” Mr Elu said.

Beyond the existing TSRA funding agreements of \$3.2 million already provided for the construction of seawalls, an estimated additional \$23 million is needed to complete the Torres Strait Coastal Works project to help improve the protection of the six most vulnerable communities against coastal flooding and erosion.

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