



## Media Release No. 702

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### **REVITALISATION OF REGION'S RICH AND DIVERSE TRADITIONAL LANGUAGES ON TRACK**

The Torres Strait is set to have its first traditional language plan and charter to guide the revitalisation of the region's rich and diverse traditional languages, thanks to the work of a dedicated Torres Strait Language Reference Group.

The draft Torres Strait Traditional Languages Plan and Charter are the product of the 2015 Torres Strait Language Symposium, hosted by the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA), which saw language specialists from across the Torres Strait come together to celebrate and plan for the future of the region's rich but endangered traditional languages.

TSRA Chairperson, Mr Joseph Elu, said that one year on from the symposium there had been significant progress made towards future language revitalisation in the region.

"The 2015 symposium was a way of bringing communities together to discuss the state of our region's traditional languages and plan for how to capitalise on some of the great work already being done in the language revitalisation space," Mr Elu said.

"A key outcome of this was the formation of the community-driven Torres Strait Language Reference Group."

The group is made up of elected representatives of each of the six language and dialect groups in the Torres Strait, and chaired by Maluyligal language group speaker Cygnet Repu.

Mr Repu said the importance of the group's work was underpinned by the knowledge that traditional languages of the Torres Strait are critically endangered.

"Traditional languages and culture can never be separated, they will always run together. But our languages will become extinct if work is not undertaken to revitalise them," Mr Repu said.

"It's all about the betterment of our children's future; we have a collective responsibility and mandate to preserve our languages for them."

Mr Repu said the Torres Strait Language Reference Group had met multiple times since the symposium in 2015 to work on the development of the Torres Strait Language Plan and Charter.

"The plan and charter were open for community feedback in late 2015 and finalised by the Reference Group Executive in February 2016," Mr Repu said.

Mr Repu said he expected a public launch of the plan and charter within the next 12 months and that he looks forward to communities continuing to work collaboratively to deliver the plan.

“There is a role for everyone to play in implementing the plan, whether it is through learning, teaching, or promoting the use of traditional languages,” Mr Repu said.

“It’s important for the younger generation to know that they won’t be the only ones being taught, but also some of their mums and dads as well.”

Mr Repu said the language plan and charter will also encourage fluent language speakers to bring traditional language out into the community.

“At the moment, when I step out of my house I become someone else,” Mr Repu said.

“I have my phone with me, I have my iPad with me, and my language differentiates as well. I stop speaking fluent Mabuyag dialect and I start speaking Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole). So what I’m teaching back home is that you don’t only have to be an Islander in the house, you need to be an Islander in the community as well.”

Mr Elu said that the TSRA had received funding in May 2015 through the Australian Government Ministry for the Arts, for the establishment of a regional language centre.

“The role of the regional language centre would be to provide support and resources to support language revitalisation in local communities through local community teams,” Mr Elu said.

“The Torres Strait Traditional Languages Plan and Charter developed by the Language Reference Group has been an essential first step to guide the work of the future language centre.”

Mr Repu praised this grass-roots approach towards language revitalisation.

“It’s important that we take ownership and direction,” Mr Repu said.

“Through the Language Charter, every individual community member and organisation will be able to sign up and make a personal commitment to take action against traditional language loss.”

“It’s about empowering ordinary people to get involved and take control of the future of our languages. To quote Dr David Suzuki, ‘it’s urgent that we empower Indigenous people everywhere and look to their leadership into the future’.”

**ENDS**

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Photo: Torres Strait Language Reference Group members Pillemon Mosby, Milton Savage, Dana Ober, Benny Mabo, Bob Kaigey, Noel Baker, Alick Tipoti, Cygnet Repu (Chairperson) Maria Tapim, Mariana Babia and Denna Nona with TSRA representatives Aven Noah Snr, Leitha Assan and Elsie Passi, and Mer community members Alo Tapim, Segar Passi, Nee Tabo and Lillah Noah.

Absent: Michael Nai, Gabriel Bani, the late Adhi Dimple Bani, Kapua Gutchen Snr, Leonora Adidi, Stephanie Savage (Tagai State College representative).



*Miratir* language workshop (Mer) participants (l-r) Noel Baker, Lillah Noah, Nee Tabo and Alick Tipoti



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