

## Media Release No.293

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### **HIGH COURT OF AUSTRALIA RESERVES TORRES STRAIT SEA CLAIM DECISION**

The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) is keenly awaiting the handing down of a High Court of Australia decision on an appeal to reinstate Native Title sea rights in the Torres Strait.

The High Court heard legal argument over the sea claim in Canberra on Tuesday 12 February and reserved its decision.

The Chairperson, Mr Joseph Elu, said the TSRA Native Title Office, which supported the appeal, had been advised by Senior Counsel that the court could take more than three months to hand down a decision.

The TSRA was represented at the hearing by the Deputy Chairperson, Mr Aven Noah, the Portfolio Member for Fisheries, Mr Kenny Bedford, and the Portfolio Member for Native Title, Mr Maluwap Nona.

Mr Elu said the Federal Court decision in 2010 recognising the native title sea claim and awarding non-exclusive commercial fishing rights was an historic step forward for the people of the Torres Strait who had fought for the right to control their own resources.

“The Commonwealth appealed against the non-exclusive fishing rights decision last year and that appeal was upheld.

“There is speculation that the granting of commercial fishing rights could set a precedent for other Traditional Owner claims over marine resources but that is not our immediate concern.

“We simply want to regain control of our marine resources so we can say how much catch commercial interests take and very importantly where they take it from.”

Mr Elu said the TSRA had already demonstrated its capacity to effectively manage leasing arrangements in the fin fishery.

“With fin fish quota leasing we are able to raise revenue to support the development of community based Torres Strait fisheries which ensures our economic independence.”

Mr Elu said with estimates putting the value of all Torres Strait fisheries at \$34 million a year, a favourable High Court decision represented a critical opportunity for continued economic development.

**ENDS**

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