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TSRA WELCOMES MAINLAND TURTLE AND DUGONG SURVEILLANCE OPERATIONS

The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) believes the recent esky checks conducted by police should not be a concern for people travelling to the mainland from the Torres Strait.

The Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (DEHP) supported by the Australian Federal Police and Queensland State Police conducted the esky checks at the airport and roadside checks on the Cape York Peninsula Development Road during December 2012.

The TSRA Chairperson, Mr Joseph Elu, said the checks were aimed at determining whether there was any illegal turtle and dugong transport from the Torres Strait and Cape York Peninsula.

“DEHP has acknowledged that traditional Owners are permitted to transport dugong and turtle meat to the mainland for traditional customs, celebrations and ceremonies and at this stage that has not changed.

“There are ongoing concerns about last year’s changes to Queensland animal cruelty legislation which could prohibit traditional hunting and the movement of turtle and dugong meat outside of Indigenous areas but that is a matter for ongoing consultation with the State government.”

Mr Elu said the TSRA had always encouraged people to report illegal hunting or marketing of turtle and dugong to the appropriate authorities.

“There were widespread allegations of illegal trade in the media last year and people were urged to report suspicious activities to the authorities but nothing came of it.

“I support the Federal and State authorities’ proactive approach to this issue.

“It is encouraging to know that despite differing views on traditional hunting some action is being taken at last to protect the marine assets that are the lifeblood of most Torres Strait communities.

“The fact that there have been no arrests or charges arising from the latest surveillance operation tends to suggest that allegations of illegal trade are little more than a beat up by ill-informed persons.”

Mr Elu said the TSRA would welcome continued surveillance which would deter illegal trade and greatly assist in the effective management of turtle and dugong in the Torres Strait.

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