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AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT URGED TO CONFIRM FULL SEA WALL FUNDING COMMITMENT

The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) Chairman, Mr Joseph Elu, believes vulnerable communities continue to face uncertainty around the construction of essential coastal protection works despite the latest funding commitment.

The Australian Government has announced the \$5million Regional Development Fund (RDF) grant originally allocated in May 2012 will now be available for seawall construction.

Mr Elu said while he welcomed the commitment to honour the original \$5 million grant, the project remained in limbo because of the uncertainty around the outstanding \$6 million of Australian Government funding.

“In the worst affected communities the shoreline has receded more than 10 metres in some areas and the ocean threatens homes and vital health, transport and communication infrastructure.

“Preliminary project funding of \$1 million was provided by the Australian Government and \$2.2 million by the TSRA in June 2012.

“The Queensland Government then confirmed its contribution of \$12 million to the project in January 2013, subject to matched funding by the Australian Government.

Mr Elu said the Torres Strait Island Regional Council, which is responsible for the delivery of the project, had begun the preliminary project works with the initial \$3.2 million investment.

“Further works are now dependant on the confirmation of all of the funding.

“It is critical that the Australian Government honour its full commitment to allow this important project to proceed and for the at risk communities of Iama, Saibai, Boigu, Poruma, Masig and Warraber to be provided with the certainty they deserve.”

Mr Elu said the TSRA will continue to seek assurances from the Australian Government that the outstanding commitment will be met.

“We were lucky during the last cyclone season as there were no tidal surges on top of the big tides but with continuing climate change uncertainty we can no longer stand by while the six communities are left at risk.

“The affected Torres Strait communities are increasingly anxious as they watch the immediate impacts of coastal inundation and many are frustrated by the continuing delays.”

Mr Elu said designs for priority seawalls construction had already been finalised as part of the first phase of the project and urgently needed works could proceed immediately once the funding was confirmed.

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