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Co-funded pilot program creates improved health infrastructure in the Torres Strait

Access to improved health infrastructure in the Torres Strait has been made possible through a pilot program of co-funding between the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) and Torres Strait Island Regional Council (TSIRC).

The TSRA Chairperson, Mr Joseph Elu, said that infrastructure projects valued at around \$800,000 have been completed since the co-funding agreement was reached April 2014.

“The TSRA recognises the financial challenges faced by councils in providing essential community facilities and the need for better integration of service delivery throughout the region,” Mr Elu said.

“The co-funding agreement means that the TSRA has provided a 50 per cent contribution towards the delivery of nine infrastructure projects throughout the region, seven of which have been successfully completed.

“These projects have the potential for a significant and positive impact on communities including improved social inclusion and recreation, health and safety and community amenity outcomes.”

Projects completed to-date include improvements to community halls on Badu and Saibai, airport fencing on Boigu and a new airport waiting shed and amenities on Mer.

The Hammond Island community has also received a new shade sail for the basketball courts, and solar lights on the wharf for improved community safety while fishing and travelling to and from home.

TSIRC Mayor, Cr Fred Gela, said the projects were identified from Council’s Community Plans that have been developed in consultation with communities.

“Each project identified and completed aligns to the *Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Regional Plan 2009-2029* and contributes to the government Indigenous Advancement Strategy and to *Close the Gap* in disadvantage between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The projects to be addressed through the co-funding agreement were identified by councillors in November 2013 according to a priority of community needs,” Mr Gela said.

“The new Mer airport waiting shed, for example, was a high priority for the community, as it replaced a non-enclosed skillion roofed structure, with logs for seats and no toilets.

“The community now has a comfortable waiting area with protection from the weather and access to the health benefits associated with the provision of public amenities.”

Mr Elu said that following the success of the pilot programme, the TSRA Board has agreed this model of funding should be considered for other councils in the region.

“The TSIRC, Torres Shire Council and Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council will each have the opportunity to submit project proposals in 2016 based on community defined areas of need,” Mr Elu said.

“Councils have already been advised of the eligibility and assessment criteria.

“Community members should speak with their local councillor or divisional manager as soon as possible about any areas of concern or need that could be addressed through improvements to community infrastructure.”

ENDS

TSRA Media Contact – Bruce Nelson telephone 0423 403 449



Image: New Mer airport waiting area. *Photo courtesy of TSIRC.*



Image: New Mer airport waiting area. *Photo courtesy of TSIRC.*



Image: Newly refurbished Community Hall on Badu. *Photo courtesy of TSIRC.*