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CALL FOR MORE CONSULTATION ON QUEENSLAND ANIMAL WELFARE CHANGES

The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) has called for more consultation on proposed changes to Queensland's Animal Care and Protection legislation.

The TSRA Chairperson, Toshie Kris, said the proposed changes to the Bill will extend animal welfare obligations to Torres Strait Islanders and have a significant impact on customary practices for dugong and turtle hunting.

"These practices have been carried out by our ancestors for thousands of years and are vital for our cultural identity and cultural wellbeing.

"For this reason it is critical that we are meaningfully consulted and that our views and recommendations are considered in a genuine way as part of this process," Mr Kris said.

"The timeframe that has been set for the current State Government consultation, including the submission of comments, is not adequate to engage in meaningful consultation with the Traditional Owners

"These are the people who are directly affected if the Bill results in changes to our traditional practices - and the state Government has not even consulted them.

"Given the limited time available and the lack of consultation with Traditional Owners we have just not been able to provide the level of feedback that we think is necessary.

"We would welcome a decision to extend the timeframe to engage in more meaningful consultation with Traditional Owners to ensure the implications are rightfully considered.

"Without that further consultation with experts, scientists and communities about what is already being done to address animal welfare issues, the proposed amendments could unintentionally have negative effects on the cultural identity and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

"This legislation could also damage our reputation and undermine our traditional rights."

Mr Kris said the Queensland Government appeared to be unjustly responding to recent media coverage that had not accurately depicted Traditional Owner hunting practices in the Torres Strait.

"The traditional methods used to hunt dugong in the Torres Strait are supported by experts as the most humane, safe and effective way to hunt this species.

“Recent public statements by the Queensland Government about the intent of the proposed changes to bring a halt to these practices are not consistent with this advice.

“The proposed amendments are also very vague about defining cruelty and we need to know what the State government considers to be so unacceptably cruel in traditional hunting.”

Mr Kris said another particularly disturbing proposal was to restrict Traditional Owners from consuming traditional foods outside community government or indigenous Regional Council areas.

“This will deny Traditional Owners of the Torres Strait living on the Australian mainland access to a resource that is vital to their cultural identity, cultural wellbeing.

“This amendment was not part of the commitments taken to the 2012 Queensland Elections and is not supported by the TSRA.”

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