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TORRES STRAIT LEADERS FORUM MEETING 6 MAY 2014

Elected representatives of the Torres Strait Regional Authority, Torres Strait Island Regional Council, Torres Shire Council and Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council (“the Coalition”) attended a Leaders Forum held on Thursday Island on 6 May 2014.

The Leaders Forum was convened to discuss formation of a new ‘One Boat’ governance model for the Cape and Torres Strait Region. The new Body would replace the TSRA, TSIRC and TSC to provide a ‘one-stop shop’ for governance in the Cape and Torres Strait Region. Dr Joseph Elu, Chair of the TSRA said at the Leaders Forum that *“we know what is best, we take a stance and we control our own destiny.”*

The ‘One Boat’ governance model would seek to drive down the cost of governance, whilst improving transparency, accountability and efficiency in service delivery and eliminating inter-agency/governmental duplication, stakeholder misalignment and waste. The Coalition has stressed that in order to achieve these goals, it will need to be supported and granted powers, functions and funding, by all levels of Government (Local, State and Commonwealth). The Coalition is confident that with the full support of all levels of Government, the “One Boat” governance model, whilst providing good governance under Western principles, will facilitate self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander first nation people and will compliment and respect traditional practices which form the very fabric of the Region. Mayor Pedro Stephen said that *“as Leaders and Kiuks, we have to set the direction in a fair and just way both in the Western World and traditionally.”*

The Leaders Forum comes on the back of historic grants of Torres Strait Islander Land in communal Freehold by the State Government under the *Torres Strait Islander Land Act 1991* (Qld) on Mer (Murray) Island on 14 December 2012 and Badu Island on 1 February 2014, to the Traditional Owners. Mayor Charlie said that *“we must shape the Governance Model to suit us, put us in there as Government and we Drive the Model”*

The “One Boat” governance model shall not replace the work already undertaken by the Coalition over the past number of years towards Territory Government, but will comprise the first steps towards this goal, followed by revision of the Electoral boundaries in establishing a Northern Cape and Torres Electorate. Mayor Gela commented at the Forum that *“we have consulted our people, now we have to deliver and provide a model of good governance. We have to move quickly, strategically and take everyone on this journey.”*

The Coalition is presently preparing modelling to meet community aspirations and will soon commence preparation of a Submission to Premier Campbell Newman and Prime Minister Tony Abbott with a view to realising the “One Boat” governance model by 2016.

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