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TSRA MEDIA STATEMENT – CLARK STREET DEVELOPMENT THURSDAY ISLAND

The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) has met with representatives from the Kaurareg Aboriginal Land Trust (KALT) after a request to temporarily suspended works on a development site in Clark Street so that a number of concerns the organisation had could be addressed. The TSRA Chairperson, Mr Joseph Elu has provided a statement on this matter.

While no specific details have been provided about the asserted cultural heritage site or its location, and no Aboriginal cultural heritage is recorded on the Cultural Heritage Database and Register as advised by the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs (DATSIMA), the TSRA have temporarily suspended the works in order to obtain further advice in relation to the issue.

The development area is on freehold land owned by the TSRA and is zoned residential under the Planning Scheme for the Torres Shire.

The TSRA takes the responsibility to protect and manage both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Heritage seriously, and as such prior to the commencement of works on the site, took all appropriate and advised steps in relation to the protection and management of cultural heritage to ensure its duty of care and responsibilities were met.

Steps taken by the TSRA to date include:

- Commissioning a qualified cultural heritage consultant to produce a Cultural Heritage Assessment Report and implementing the recommendations of that report;
- Conducting a Cultural Heritage Database Search which revealed there are no recorded Indigenous Cultural Heritage in relation to the site;
- Implementing procedures which require the Contractor to undertake cultural awareness training in relation to the potential for cultural heritage to be encountered;
- Specific monitoring by the Contractor's personnel in relation to excavation works; and
- Adopting and implementing a Cultural Heritage Finds policy.

In 2013 the TSRA engaged a cultural heritage consultant to undertake detailed assessments of the cultural heritage issues which related to the site and to ascertain its suitability for a small housing development. This consultant had extensive experience in this capacity and specifically this site.

The Cultural Heritage Assessment concluded that the site did not appear to contain any significant cultural features.

The TSRA recognises that regardless of the advice received that consultation with the Kaurareg Aboriginal People was not necessary given the above circumstances, better engagement should have taken place in good faith.

The TSRA will now ensure wider consultation takes place on any future land development projects by the TSRA.

The TSRA is in the process of contacting the parties responsible for Kaurareg Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act matters, and will work with them to resolve the matter.

ENDS

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