



## Media Release No. 696

**For release 25 February 2016**

### **Gardening gets a new lease of life through Saibai's Mekem Garden**

The Saibai Mekem Garden site was opened with a blessing ceremony this week. The Saibai garden site has been re-developed over the past year and will provide an accessible site for traditional and contemporary horticulture.

The Senator, Honourable Nigel Scullion, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, and the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) Chair and Chief Executive Officer were in attendance, with the Minister assisting students from Tagai State College to plant mango trees at the site to commemorate the event.

After the official ceremony over 200 community members celebrated the event at the community hall, with dance performances from Tagai State College students and the "Moeyngu Koekaper" dance team from Saibai.

The TSRA Chairperson, Mr Joseph Elu, said Saibai people have had a long tradition of subsistence gardening, however with the introduction of community stores and regular barge services, traditional garden practises have declined in the last 50 years.

"As access to affordable healthy food declines across the region there is a growing need for access to locally grown produce to improve the health standards of remote communities," Mr Elu said.

The Saibai Mekem Garden project seeks to motivate people to re-engage with, and develop an interest in, food gardening - an activity that was once a fundamental aspect of traditional daily life on Saibai.

"The project will assist individuals, families and the wider community to gain the skills and capacities required to access a wider range of fresher and more affordable fruits, vegetables and herbs than what is currently available," Mr Elu said.

"While the project acknowledges the current practices still occurring in some family groups on Saibai, it also focusses on the use of contemporary horticulture techniques."

Mr Elu said the project is structured and resourced to ensure there is a focus on increasing initiatives such as awareness, motivation, promotion, education and capacity building through targeted community workshops.

“This will be in addition to the technical horticultural support services already established through the project in previous years and complement services offered through other organisations like Community Development Programme providers, My Pathway,” Mr Elu said.

“The project will be delivered through an integrated approach between multiple agencies working to increase the uptake of sustainable horticultural practice and facilitate healthier lifestyles for Saibai people.”

The TSRA has assisted in the development of the project through providing funding for the gardens shed, fence and greenhouse, and will continue to provide technical support through the Sustainable Horticulture project up until 2018.

The project is a partnership between the TSRA, Mura Buway Regional Native Title Body Corporate (RNTBC), My Pathways, Torres Strait Island Regional Council (TSIRC) and Tagai State College.

**ENDS**

**TSRA Media Contact – Bruce Nelson telephone 0423 403 449**