



April 7, 2014

Delivering for Torres Strait fisheries

A meeting of the Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) which oversees commercial and traditional fishing in the Torres Strait will be held this Wednesday on Thursday Island.

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture, Senator Richard Colbeck; Queensland Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, John McVeigh; and chair of the Torres Strait Regional Authority, Joseph Elu AO, are the members of the Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA).

They will meet with stakeholders, including Indigenous and non-Indigenous fishers, ahead of the 23rd PZJA Meeting on Wednesday.

Senator Colbeck said fishing makes major contribution to the people and economy of the Torres Strait it is important the local community have an opportunity to see and understand the deliberations of the meeting.

“I am pleased to be in the Torres Strait to work with the people who have a deep understanding about matters in this region and of fishing in general. I look forward to positive results from our meeting,” Senator Colbeck said.

“For too long the work of the PZJA, an authority that is responsible for managing the commercial and traditional fishing in the Australian area of the Torres Strait, has taken a back seat.”

“This meeting on Thursday Island shows the Coalition’s commitment to improving engagement with Indigenous communities and to acknowledging and protecting the traditional way of life for the region’s Indigenous community.”

Senator Colbeck said the meeting has an ambitious agenda including how the management of the fisheries can contribute to the economic development and employment opportunities of the region.

The aspiration of Traditional Inhabitants to full ownership of the Torres Strait fisheries will be central to these considerations.

Senator Colbeck said the attendance of the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator Nigel Scullion, was opportune given the importance fisheries plays in the lives of Torres Strait Islanders.

“Minister Scullion has a long and heartfelt commitment to working in partnership with communities to improve the social and economic outlook for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders.

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Queensland Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry John McVeigh said:

"Fishing is a critical part of the fabric of the Torres Strait community and it is important that it be well managed both now and for future generations."

Minister McVeigh said he was keen to work with other members of the PZJA to deliver this outcome.

TSRA Chairman, Mr Joseph Elu, said the PZJA was an integral part of the process to help make the best decisions about how traditional and commercial fisheries in the Torres Strait are managed.

"Bringing all the stakeholders together to ensure the best outcomes for our fisheries industry, and how to achieve those outcomes, should be our primary focus," Mr Elu said.

"Ownership and control of the industry are important issues, but without a management plan it could amount to nothing.

"A well-managed industry should not only be sustainable, but also open up industry development opportunities for the benefit of all Torres Strait Islanders."

Senator Colbeck said PZJA members would also meet with Papua New Guinea representatives responsible for managing the PNG zone of the Torres Strait, in close cooperation with Australia.

"I am looking forward to meeting members of the Torres Strait Regional Authority, staff from the Department of Agriculture who perform essential biosecurity functions in the Torres Strait, as well as catching up with locals while I am here," he said.

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