

TSRA Annual Report 2011-12
Section One:
Strategic Overview

Chairperson's Message

At the close of the Torres Strait Regional Authority's (TSRA) eighteenth year, I am proud to report on the change and progress that marks our past twelve months of operations.

Our efforts continue to make a difference to the lives of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people living in the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area. In partnership with the Australian Government, the Queensland Government and the Local Councils in the region, we have delivered important infrastructure which has improved living standards in some of Australia's most remote communities. This year, five major projects were completed, improving water supply, sewerage reticulation, road surfacing and drainage. Work is progressing on an additional five projects which will deliver similar results in the coming year.

In my report this year I have focused on our achievements against the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Regional Plan 2009 - 2029 and some significant changes in governance arrangements which will enable the TSRA to move even closer to the achievement of our vision, to empower our people, in our decision, in our culture for the future.

Sea Walls and Infrastructure Protection

The TSRA has secured the initial funding required to start the refurbishment and construction of sea walls to protect communities which suffer significant damage from seawater inundation. The TSRA hopes to secure the full amount of funding required to complete the full works to safeguard Saibai, Boigu and then Lama, and continue negotiating for future support for the six low-lying Torres Strait islands. The region is experiencing an increase in sea levels in the order of six millimetres per year. Sea level rise has damaged critical infrastructure and culturally significant sites in vulnerable communities. The TSRA acknowledges the contribution made by the Australian Government towards seawall construction and will continue to lobby the Queensland Government to match this funding so that work can be completed without further delay.

Improving Governance

In 2011 the TSRA commissioned a report from independent consultants to review our governance arrangements. One of the significant findings from the review was a clear message from communities that people preferred that TSRA Board Members should be appointed by independent election. Over the past 18 years, 17 of our 20 Members have been appointed as a result of the Queensland Local Government Elections and only three have been directly appointed. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005 (ATSI Act) has been amended so that in 2012 those independent elections can take place. The title of the General Manager of the TSRA was changed to Chief Executive Officer in 2011 - 2012 by way of an amendment to the ATSI Act.

The TSRA Board's governance model was further strengthened this year with the formation of a new expertise based advisory committee. The Indigenous Fisheries Advisory Committee (IFAC) comprises eight members from commercial fisheries industries in the region. The IFAC provides advice and recommendations to the TSRA Board on economic development and the sustainable management of Torres Strait fisheries.

Integrated Service Delivery

Since the adoption of the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Regional Plan 2009 - 2029, the TSRA, representing the Australian Government, has been working closely with the Queensland Government and the three Local Government Councils in the region to implement an Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) project to improve the coordination of services in the region. In 2012, 19 community booklets were produced showing the progress that has been made since the initial Regional Plan community consultations in 2008. The Regional Plan community booklets document both a base line and a directory of services provided in, or available to, communities in the region. The booklets can be used by community members to measure progress and to hold governments accountable for delivering on service agreements.

Natural Resource Management

The TSRA has made important progress to ensure that natural resource management in the Torres Strait is based on the principle of sustainability. The region has 14 community based turtle and dugong management plans which have been implemented. Traditional hunting of turtle and dugong remains a sensitive issue for the region and the TSRA is actively working with Torres Strait Island communities, government, industry and research institutions to manage this important resource.

I am pleased to say that the Land and Sea Rangers were successfully transitioned from Torres Strait Island Regional Council to the TSRA at the start of the year. By 30 June 2012, the TSRA has expanded the ranger program to 14 communities, providing employment for 33 rangers. The program will expand to 45 Rangers and five Natural Resource Management Officers over the next year. The employment opportunities, training and skills transfer as well as the land and sea projects being undertaken by the rangers is making a difference in communities.

Major Capital Works

The TSRA was able to secure a commitment of \$21.0 million from the Australian Government in May 2012 for environmental health infrastructure in the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area. In accordance with the arrangements pertaining to previous rounds of the Major Infrastructure Program (MIP) these funds are to be matched by contributions from the Queensland Government.

Memorandum of Agreements with Local Government

A Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) has been completed between the TSRA and the Torres Strait Island Regional Council (TSIRC) which will strengthen the working relationship between both organisations to maximise opportunities for cooperation when delivering against the priorities in the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Regional Plan 2009 - 2029.

Fin Fish Trust Fund Disbursement

\$530,000 was disbursed to the communities of Erub, Masig, Mer and Ugar from the Fin Fish Trust Account through a competitive grants process. These funds will assist with capacity building and industry development in these four finfish communities.

Engagement with Ministers

In December 2011 the TSRA hosted a visit by the former Queensland Minister for Fisheries, Craig Wallace, in his role as a member of the Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA). I am pleased to advise that during this visit we were able to announce that the PZJA had secured the funding required for a further buy-out of Tropical Rock Lobster (TRL) fishing licences held by non-Indigenous fishers. This buy-out created the mechanism for Indigenous Fishers in the region to gain increased ownership the TRL fishery. This is a significant economic resource for the region.

In March 2012, I attended a Senate Estimates Hearing in Canberra supported by the TSRA's Chief Executive Officer and Chief Financial Officer.

Senator Jan McLucas, Senator for Queensland, visited the region in April 2012 and was a guest at the fifth annual TSRA Gab Titui Art Awards. Australian Government Senator Ian Macdonald also visited the Torres Strait region in June 2012.

Native Title

The TSRA, as the Native Title Representative Body for the Torres Strait region, has developed an Infrastructure and Housing Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) for use by each of the Prescribed Bodies Corporate (PBCs) in the region. The ILUA contains many innovations and its underlying objective is to ensure that native title is managed in a comparable way to 'mainstream' freehold land titles. The ILUA is intended to be a 'one stop shop' style of agreement which satisfies both native title and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage lore. The use of an ILUA should allow infrastructure projects to proceed more quickly than if native title requirements had to be negotiated on a project by project basis.

Conclusion

The TSRA operates in partnership with many organisations to ensure that progress is being made in the Torres Strait. The TSRA Portfolio Members, Board Members and Administration all play key roles in maintaining the close links to community which help to overcome many of the challenges we face. We are now seeing real progress towards achieving the objectives of the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Regional Plan 2009 - 2029, through our Integrated Service Delivery initiatives. The new TSRA election model will produce further changes and I look forward to working with all elected community representatives to advance the interests of all Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people in the region.

John T. Kris
Chairperson

Chief Executive Officer's Message

While the 2011 - 2012 Financial Year was a busy period for the TSRA, it was also a very productive 12 months that has continued to lay the foundation for a number of important milestones in the 20 year journey which is mapped out in the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Regional Plan 2009 - 2029.

A number of short-term goals were achieved as per my report last year in addressing the TSRA Governance review, expanding the Torres Strait ranger program and preparing for the TSRA elections. You can find many of the achievements from the past year throughout this report.

In the mid to long-term, capacity building has continued to occur in many communities with support from the TSRA to organisations, individuals, families and local governments to help grow sustainability and resilience within key industries that can help to create long-term employment.

In this report, there is a selection of case studies to highlight some of the stories of everyday people in the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area who are working towards their dreams with assistance from the TSRA.

Without repeating achievements highlighted in the Chairperson's message, some of the important milestones from the past 12 months that I would like to share with you are:

Expanding the ranger program to all outer island communities The number of rangers on country is now 33 compared to 21 when I last presented this report. The TSRA has been funded for 45 Ranger and five Natural Resource Management Officers and the ranger program will expand to meet this target in 2012- 2013. I wish to thank all the rangers, their communities and the administration teams that have worked to establish the rangers on country.

Common Funding Rounds Funding Rounds continued in 2011 - 2012 and were effective in delivering over \$2.6 million directly to groups, individuals and enterprises in remote communities. This is now an annual cycle with one funding round opening in March each year (funds are released in July), while the second round opens in September (funds released in January).

Outer Island Offices With the expansion of the ranger program, the TSRA now has offices on each of the islands with rangers. Establishing these offices challenged the organisation in 2011 - 2012 to adjust its business model and we hope that in the years to come this model will not only help to improve delivery of TSRA programs on communities, but provide an opportunity to work in partnership with Prescribed Bodies Corporate, the local governments and community groups on the ground.

Leadership Development The TSRA continued to invest in the region's current and future leadership with three individuals participating in the innovative Australian Rural Leadership Program and a further seven on the Training Rural Australians in Leadership and Torres Strait Youth Leadership programs.

Environment The Torres Strait region has a unique natural environment and through the rangers as well as the Dugong and Turtle management initiative which form part of the TSRA's Environmental Management Program, this pristine and important part of Australia is being protected in partnership with our communities and traditional owners.

Regional Communications The recommendations from the Regional Communications Review were implemented in the past 12 months and support continues for broadcasting in the region through both the Torres Strait Islanders' Media Association (4 MW Radio Service) and the Torres Strait Island Regional Council Regional Indigenous Broadcasting Service (RIBS) operators.

Workplace Health and Safety The TSRA continued to provide a safe working environment for its employees. With the change from the Occupational Health and Safety Act 1983 (Cth) to the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Cth), the TSRA has reviewed its safety procedures and provided training to employees on both the new Act and its operational activities.

There are many other milestones and stories in this report that I hope you will take the time to read and to share with your community and / or stakeholder groups.

As we enter a new financial year, 2012 - 2013 is promising to be another important year for the TSRA. While there are many global and national challenges that will impact on the TSRA's operating environment, both in the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area region and abroad, I look forward to working with the TSRA Board to meet these and continue to deliver on the Regional Plan's blueprint for development.

I would like to thank the TSRA Board for their leadership over the past 12 months and the TSRA staff who worked tirelessly to ensure that the leadership's vision could be delivered. My appreciation is also extended to the many agencies, councils, community organisations, individuals and stakeholder groups that have worked in partnership with the TSRA to make many of these milestones possible.