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Zenadth Kes Youth Strategy 2025 – 2030

A community initiative led by the Project Steering Committee and Youth Research Group funded by the Torres Strait Regional Authority.



Acknowledgement of Country

We pay respect to the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waters on which we work. We honour the resilience and continuing connection to land and sea country, culture and community of all Torres Strait Islander peoples and Aboriginal peoples across Australia. We recognise the decisions we make today will impact the lives of generations to come.

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Appendix 4: Looking Forward 33

Report artwork "Githalay Karumuy Azam Zarram" by Jymahl Savage for Saltwater People, 2025.

Jymahl bases his artworks on his life experience and island lifestyle. An emerging artist from Badhu, Jymahl works in a range of 2 and 3D, including lino and monoprints, wood and pearl-shell carving.

Acknowledgement of Support

The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) extend our sincere appreciation to all project stakeholders for your support in developing the Zenadth Kes Youth Strategy *(the Youth Strategy)*.

We would like to specifically acknowledge the members of the Project Steering Group and Youth Research Group. Your leadership, local knowledge, invaluable feedback and ongoing support has been crucial in shaping the outcomes of this project.

A special thank you to our key collaborators, including the Department of Women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships and Multiculturalism, Tagai State College, Thursday Island Community Justice Group, Torres Strait Kaziw Meta, Mura Kosker Sorority, Torres Health, the Kaurareg Native Title Aboriginal Corporation, Torres Shire Council and Island Stars. Your hard work and passion for culture, young people, and community enabled meaningful local connections, engagement, and findings.

We also recognise the contributions of representatives from various service providers as well as community members, whose valuable insights have informed this process.

Our deepest gratitude goes to the young people who participated in conversations, forums, workshops, and surveys. Thank you for sharing your experiences and for trusting us with your challenges, hopes, ideas and dreams.



Meet the Artist

Au Esoau and Koeyma Eso to Eileen Solomon, Secondary Student at Tagai State College and Gab Titui Indigenous Art Awards entrant 2023 for licensing her artwork, *My Island Home*, for use as the primary artwork in the promotion of the Zenadth Kes Youth Strategy, engagement, survey and promotional materials.

Story

My painting reflects the sense of belonging and draws the calmness and tranquillity as the sun sets over the horizon. When I look at the beautiful islands of the Torres Strait, I feel peace like home.



Eileen Solomon

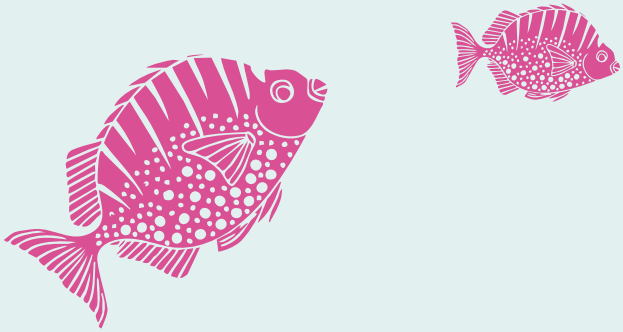
Community:	Badhu
Clan:	Wakaid
Totem:	Koedal (crocodile), Thupmul (thorny ray)
Artwork Title:	My Island Home
Year:	2023
Medium:	Acrylic on canvas



Zenadth Kes Region and Languages

Source: Torres Strait Traditional Languages Association

Executive Summary



The Zenadth Kes Youth Strategy *(the Youth Strategy)* is a community initiative led by the Project Steering Group and Youth Research Group, that brings together the diverse experiences and perspectives of young people, service providers and the broader community of the Torres Strait.

The Youth Strategy focussed on young people, aged 12 to 25, on the Inner Islands of Waiben (Thursday Island), Ngurupai (Horn Island), Kiriri (Hammond Island) and Muralag (Prince of Wales Island) as the largest cohort of local youth receiving an education, pursuing training or undertaking work opportunities in the region. Contributions and perspectives from young people studying, living or working on the mainland have also been incorporated.

Our young people have shared with us what makes them feel happy including being on or near the ocean, practicing culture, playing sports, creating art, using technology, enjoying the outdoors, and connecting with their family and friends.

At the same time, they are grappling to make sense of a range of local, national and global issues including racism, discrimination, substance misuse, the cost of living, bullying, mental health challenges, domestic violence, homelessness, relationships, online risks, and climate change.

Just like any other community member, Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal youth have lived experiences to share and unique perspectives about their communities and futures.

Recognising the diverse stages, needs, and challenges specific to young people is essential for effectively supporting them as they navigate their formative years into adulthood. It provides a strategic framework that can be used to advocate for change and genuinely engage and deliver culturally responsive and youth-centred programs, services, and policies, improving options and opportunities for young people across the region.

It acknowledges that there are ongoing disparities not just on the inner islands, but across the Torres Strait & NPA region as a whole, that must be addressed to ensure young people have equal opportunities and outcomes, both in relation to non-Indigenous Australians and other Indigenous Queenslanders, as part of Closing the Gap efforts.

The Youth Strategy is designed to empower young people, helping them feel confident, proud, and valued, while amplifying their voices in community, government, and decision-making processes.

With **Culture, Identity** and **Well-being** at its heart, *the Youth Strategy* outlines 6 key themes, known as 'Guiding Stars' to help young people successfully navigate a self-determined path toward their best life.

- → **Cultural knowledge and guidance** – be connected to culture and community.
- → **Voice and change** – feel heard, accepted, included, and valued.
- → **Explore and participate** – have opportunities to have fun, explore and discover.
- → **Opportunities and options** – be supported to learn, earn, contribute, and feel good.
- → **Connected and mobile** – be included in digital futures to support our connection to culture and expand our opportunities.
- → **Holistic health** – feel safe, well and a sense of belonging.

About the development of the Youth Strategy

Governance

The Youth Strategy has broad community ownership. The development of *the Youth Strategy* was governed by a Project Steering Group which included local service provider representation and three levels of government. In parallel, a Youth Research Group, whose membership was made-up of young people, played a vital role in guiding engagement and providing advice, knowledge and experience into the development of *the Youth Strategy.*

The Torres Strait Regional Authority funded and managed the project through the Safe Communities Program.

Youth and community engagement

In 2019-20, a draft youth strategy was developed by local stakeholders through extensive consultation however was not finalised. This strategy and action plan takes into consideration the original draft strategy and recognises the extensive work and contributions to date of the community, organisations and families.

A key focus of *the Youth Strategy* was to ensure the voices of young people, famililies and broader community directly informed its development. Young people and the broader community were engaged during a 7-month period through face-to-face meetings, community workshops, forums, roundtables, presentations, and online surveys. *The Youth Strategy Engagement Report,* a separate document, includes engagement details, findings and a list of stakeholders engaged in the process.

All together there were 601 engagement touchpoints across the consultation. Highlights include:

207
young people who participated in youth forums

156
young people who completed the youth survey

66
young people/service providers/ community members who participated in themed roundtables

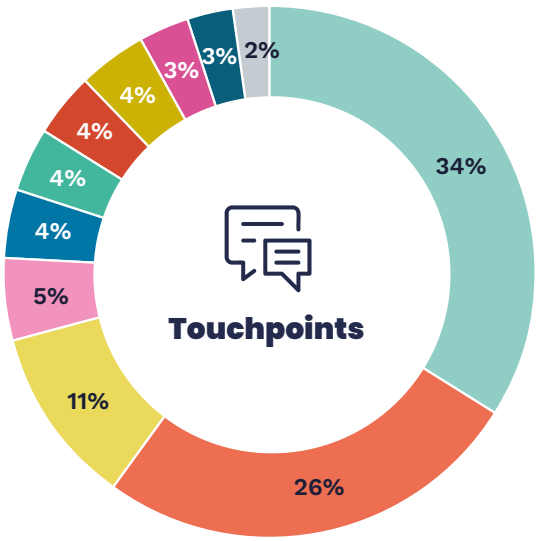
28
people who participated in the service provider forum

15
people who participated in the community forums

Young people's insights into their lived experiences and perspectives informed and grounded the development of the draft youth strategy. The draft youth strategy was released publically in November 2024 and invited feedback by young people and the wider community.

This *Youth Strategy* is the final product of this process, and is a culmination of the youth and community engagement process.

The graph below is a breakdown by percentage of the 601 engagement touchpoints.



- Youth Forums
- Youth Survey
- Themed roundtables
- Service provider forum
- Youth research group meetings
- Project steering group meetings
- Interagency / working group meetings
- Other
- Community forum
- One-on-one / small group meetings
- Parents meeting

Demographics

1,792

Young people aged 10 to 24 living in the Torres Strait

Source: ABS - QuickStats & Community Profiles (2021)

6,092

Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people living in the Torres Strait.

Source: ABS - QuickStats & Community Profiles (2021)

348

Students enrolled in TAGAI State College, Secondary Campus on Thursday Island

Term 3, 2024.
Source: Tagai State College (Annual Report 2024)

97

Secondary students from the outer islands who reside in boarding colleges on the Inner Islands during the school term to attend Tagai State College.

Source: TSRA (2025)

Closing the Gap target measures

Comparative data with other Queensland Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities demonstrates that we are not closing the gap for Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal young people living in the region. In fact, we are increasingly falling behind. For example:

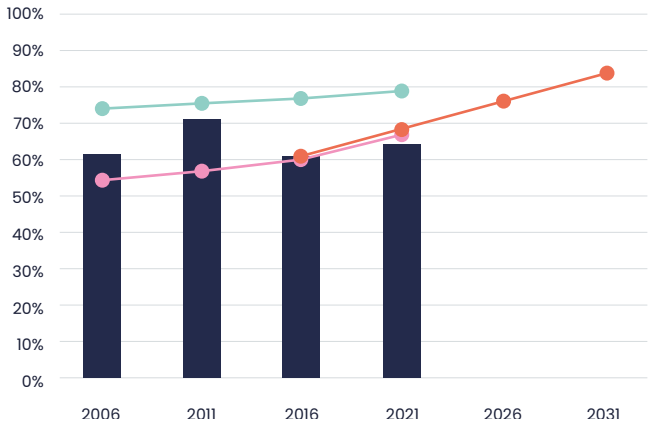
- → Attainment of year 12 or equivalent for 20 to 24 year olds was 8% lower in 2021 than it was 10 years previously in 2011; and the Torres Strait Region was already behind the National Closing the Gap target in 2021 by 9%.
- → In 2011 27% of young people in the Torres Strait Region, between 25 and 34 years, had a tertiary qualification or equivalent – was almost equal to the average for Queensland's Indigenous population. However 10 years on, in 2021, the Torres Strait Region had fallen behind the rest of Queensland Indigenous population by 7% and the Closing the Gap target for that year (44%).
- → Whilst we had an improvement in engagement in employment, education and training for young people (15 to 23 years) in the 5 year period to 2021, we remain behind the Queensland Indigenous average by 15% and the Closing the Gap target for the same year by 6%.

We are falling behind and failing our young people. Not only are we not closing the gap between non-Indigenous Australians, but we are also not keeping pace with other Indigenous Queenslanders.

The graphs below present a snapshot of progression against educational outcomes measured under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The statistics used are based on available data and should be interpreted and used with caution.

TARGET 5

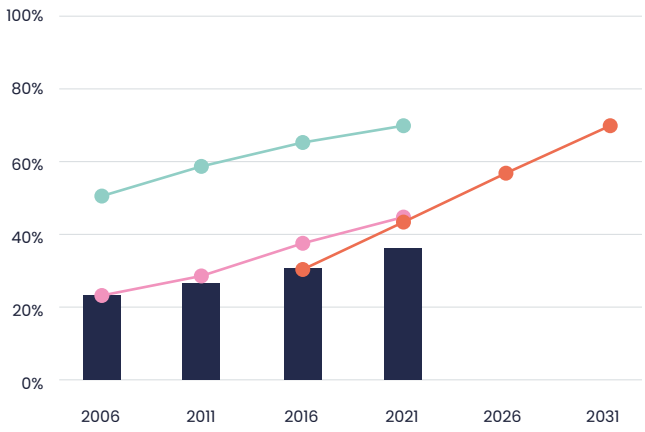
Attain year 12 or equivalent (20-24 years)



Torres Strait Region Indigenous
Queensland non-Indigenous
Queensland Indigenous
CtG National Target

TARGET 6

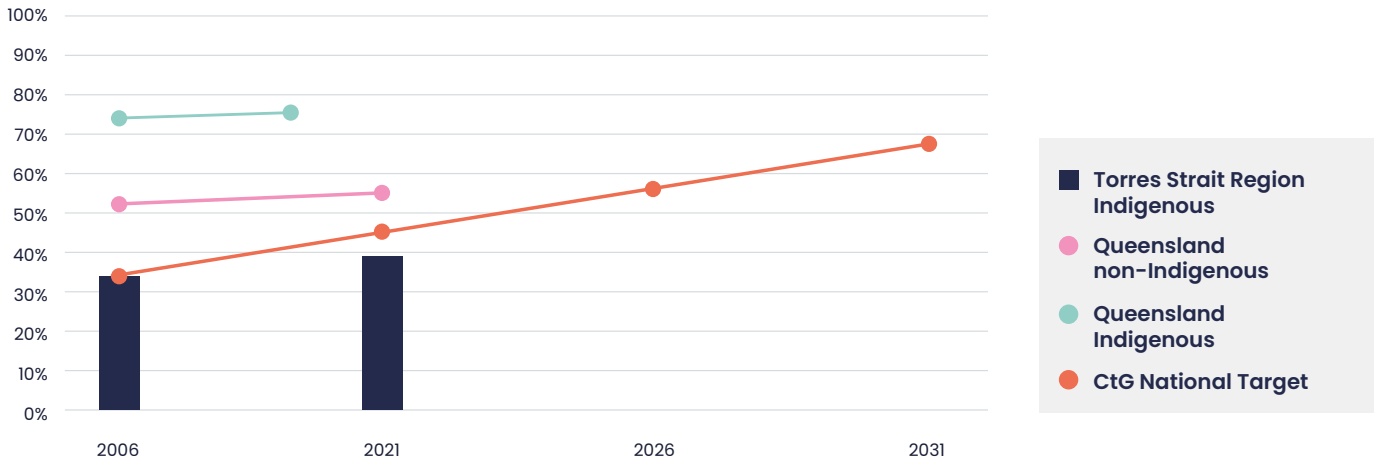
Attain tertiary qualification (25-34 years)



Torres Strait Region Indigenous
Queensland non-Indigenous
Queensland Indigenous
CtG National Target

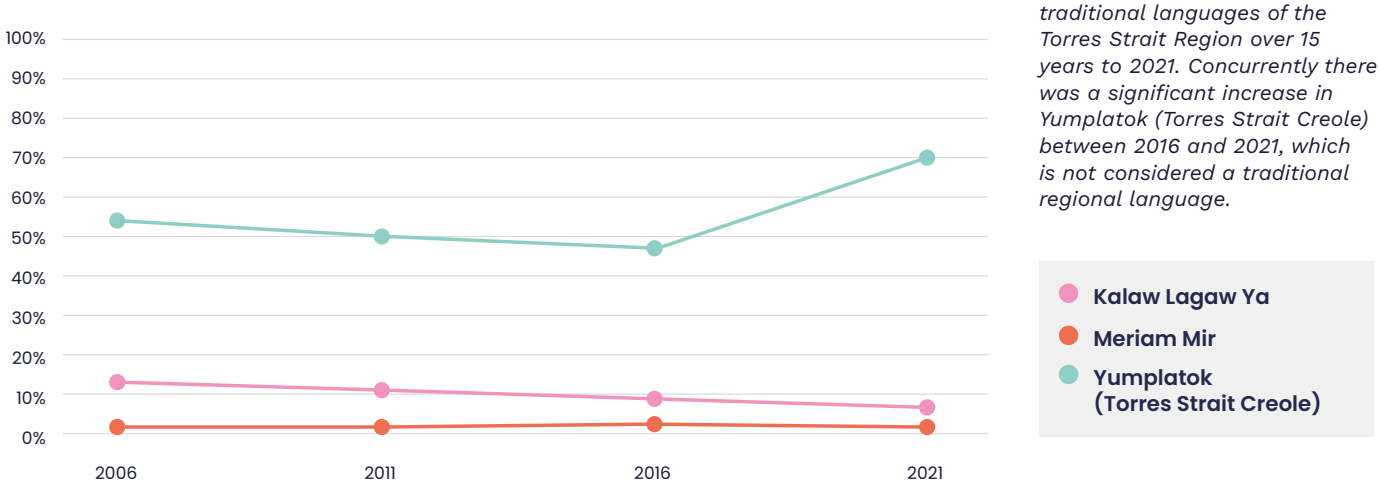
TARGET 7

Engaged in employment, education or training (15-23 years)



TARGET 16B

Increase in number & strength of languages being spoken



The graph to the left shows a decline in speaking the two traditional languages of the Torres Strait Region over 15 years to 2021. Concurrently there was a significant increase in Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole) between 2016 and 2021, which is not considered a traditional regional language.

Drivers that contribute to achieving Closing the Gap targets

19%

Lower student attendance rate for TAGAI State College Secondary Campus compared to Queensland average year (Semester 1, 2023)

Source: Dept of Education via Qld Government Statisticians Office

15%

The percentage of 'victims of offences against a person' Torres Region who were aged 10-17 years in 2023

Source: Qld Policy Service and Qld Treasury concordance-based estimates

25%

Student Disciplinary Absences for TAGAI Secondary College in 2023

Source: TAGAI State College

30%

Students at TAGAI Secondary College who exited school between 2021 and 2023

Source: TAGAI State College

Youth Strategy Foundational Principles

Young people want to know who they are and where they come from. They want to learn about their culture, know their language, feel a sense of belonging, be on land and sea country, build confidence and skills, take on responsibilities and make good choices about their futures.

Culture shapes young people's sense of self in the world and is part of their identity. When young people know the elements that make up their cultural identity, they can explore who they are and feel grounded in values as they journey through the ups and downs of life. However, when young people are confused about who they are and what purpose they have in community and within the broader context of the world, they can feel disconnected and lost.

We know that culture and identity is a source of strength, resilience, and pride, and underpins health, social and emotional well-being, and overall wellness.

Three foundational principles have been identified as core priorities for *the Youth Strategy* – **Culture, Identity** and **Well-being.** When culture and identity is strong, it supports holistic well-being of the self, the family and the community.

- → **Culture** is fundamental to our children's identity, values, and purpose.
- → **Identity** is a key part of a young person's journey of self-discovery, helping them to know who they are, what they value and where they belong.
- → **Well-being** is closely linked to young people's identity and the mind, body and spirit must be strong to support a positive journey to adulthood and through life.

When young people, their families, and their communities are empowered through culture, identity, and well-being, they create a nurturing environment that fosters resilience and growth.

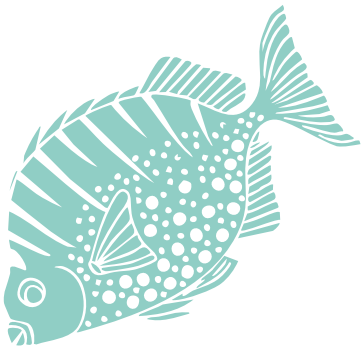
This interconnected and important relationship is highlighted in the diagram:

"The Youth Strategy must empower and support families to build cultural strength."

UNCLE GABRIEL BANI



Inclusion of Diversity





Some groups of young people are often excluded and experience higher threats to their well-being, based on discriminatory factors such as their culture, gender, sexuality, disability, and geographic location. Key populations of young people on the Inner Islands may include:

- Young girls and women
- Young people with disabilities
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Sistergirl, Brotherboy + young people
- Young parents
- Young people not in education, training or employment
- Young people living away from their home island (diaspora community)

Young Torres Strait Islander and/or Aboriginal people visiting or living on the mainland may experience even higher threats to their wellbeing, based on their cultural background in addition to any other intersecting factors.

Young people living on the Inner Islands who do not identify as Torres Strait Islander and/or Aboriginal, may also feel excluded.

Therefore, a strengths based intersectional approach should be taken when interpreting and implementing this *Youth Strategy*. Young people are diverse and require tailored and culturally appropriate responses to support their unique needs – accessible, accepting and gender-affirming.

> **"We need to prepare to take over the responsibilities."**

Six Guiding Stars

The Youth Strategy **is built on six Guiding Stars, to support young people on their journeys through life and to adulthood.**

Built on the foundational principles of Culture, Identity and Well-being, the Guiding Stars are designed to support young people to explore interests and develop knowledge, skills, and values for personal growth and well-being.





1

Cultural Knowledge and Guidance

be connected to culture and community.

2

Voice and Change

feel heard, accepted, included and valued.

3

Participate and Explore

have opportunities to have fun, explore and discover.

4

Opportunities and Options

be supported to learn, earn, contribute, and feel good.

5

Connected and Mobile

be included in digital futures to support our connection to culture and expand our opportunities.

6

Holistic Health

feel safe, well and a sense of belonging.

Guiding Star 1

Cultural Knowledge and Guidance

Since time immemorial, Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal culture, knowledge, leadership and governance systems has been passed down through generations within families through oral history about cultural and spiritual beliefs, totems, values, customs, rituals, history, practices, relationships, and ways of life.

While young people on the Inner Islands have some understanding of their culture and language, their depth of knowledge varies. Many recognise the importance of their cultural identity, but struggle with where to begin learning or who to approach for guidance.

Young people want to feel connected to their culture and make their families proud. They want more opportunities to spend time with Elders and community members to practice traditional languages, stories, songs and dances, and to come together through cultural activities, celebrations and events. This includes recognising and understanding the different cultures and practices young people identify with across their island communities.

Young people also want safe places, both in and out of school, where they can learn and practice culture and make mistakes, supported by Elders, family, and community.

Prioritising cultural skill development, along with projects and excursions, is essential for lifelong skills and learning. Young people can strengthen their resilience and adaptability to a changing world.

Each year, students from eleven years old leave their families to attend high school on Thursday Island or the mainland. For four to six years, they spend 40 weeks per year away from their families, learning and adapting to another culture which impacts their sense of self and identity.

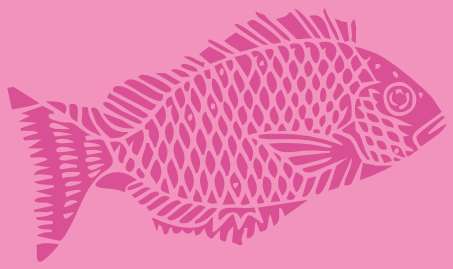
To support their long-term well-being as well as strong and sustainable home islands and diaspora communities, young people must be grounded in culture and identity including traditional language, practices, and traditions.

> **"More activities together with community involvement teaching culture & awareness from a young age so we are taught to be respectful, honest, responsible & courageous"**

The key priorities for young people are:

1. Guidance from Elders through the cultural transition from adolescence to adulthood.
2. Support from Elders and cultural mentors to learn traditional language, cultural practices, and traditions.
3. Inclusion in co-designing local events and activities with community to practice and celebrate culture.
4. Meaningful opportunities for young people living away from home to connect with their culture and know who they are.

Guiding Star 1



82% of young people identify as knowing their Totem

74% of young people identify as speaking Yumpla Tok (Torres Strait Kriol/Creole)

71% of young people identify as knowing their bloodline, clan or tribe

61% feel connected to their culture

57% of young people identify as speaking their traditional language

27% of young people identify as speaking Meriam Mir

27% of young people identify as speaking Kalaw Lagaw Ya

The above statistics are from the results of Zenadth Kes Youth Survey and should be interpreted and used with caution.

Guiding Star 2

Voice and Change

Young people face layered, intersecting and complex challenges - including institutional racism, health disparities, domestic and family violence, the climate crisis, rapid technological advancements, mental health pressures, and economic uncertainty – all of which require innovative responses and culturally responsive solutions from a variety of community voices, including young people.

Young people are aware of and concerned about political impacts on their communities, as they navigate the systematic effects of colonisation that have led to trauma, challenges, disadvantages, and disparities for their families and communities. They experienced both the lead-up and outcomes of the *Voice to Parliament* referendum, giving them firsthand experience of institutional racism and systematic issues on a national scale.

Today's young people are not only managing longstanding and unjust issues within their families and communities, but they are also confronted with new challenges arising from social, economic, environmental, and technological changes in recent decades.

While many young people shared a range of experiences and concerns, they also expressed hope for the future and a strong interest in supporting their families, communities, land and sea country. However, our young people across all islands face barriers including being recognised, supported and empowered to speak up on youth issues.

They need cultural knowledge, support, mentoring and guidance from family and community, along with youth-led spaces to practice sharing their ideas and to build the confidence needed to take on leadership roles. Importantly, equitable opportunities must be provided to diverse groups of young people, to build the skills and confidence to speak up.

When young people feel safe, respected, valued, and included, they can confidently contribute to advocacy issues on a local, national, and international level, bringing new insights and fresh perspectives.

Young people are a powerful force for change and must be given various platforms to ensure their diverse and important voices are heard.

> **"(We need to) Stop racism - we need a key to a new society. There's light on the other side"**

Guiding Star 2

"We want flooding to stop because it's causing damage to our environment. We are building sea walls to stop the tides but please don't do any more harm or damage to Mother Nature."



The key priorities for young people are:

1. Support to build skills, confidence, and agency to speak-up personally, for friends and peers.
2. Inclusion of diverse voices that are genuinely heard and incorporated in policies, programs, and services.
3. Meaningful opportunities to contribute to the design of programs, policies and initiatives that respond to local, national and international issues young people care about.
4. Access to youth-led spaces where young people feel safe, accepted and included.
5. A seat at the local, national and international table when considering climate crisis and digital futures, including impacts and possible solutions.

Guiding Star 3

Participate and Explore

Young people want to be young and have fun. They want more opportunities to access safe spaces where they can relax with friends, play sport, express creativity, prepare and share traditional food, learn new things, and connect with community.

Engaging young people in community activities and providing safe spaces where they can be themselves, build confidence, and interact with their peers is essential for their development and well-being. These environments foster relationships, enchance social skills and expand support networks, while building trust with mentors and role models which is key to supporting social and emotional well-being.

Young people need access to cultural resources such as music, dance, performing arts, and festivals, which can foster cultural confidence, creative expression, and skill development. Additionally, participation in volunteering and part-time jobs can support essential life skills, including teamwork and leadership. However, young people's choices are limited due to a lack of available options to *participate and explore* on the Inner Islands. This is exacerbated by barriers to accessing existing facilities, inadequate facility maintenance, and limited after hours transport between Thursday Island and the neighbouring island communities.

> **"(We need) something to look forward to doing every day. That includes EVERYONE, not just sport. So organised activities and even a youth centre would be great. Something for all kids to look forward to"**

> **"More support and feelings of comfort to allow the youth to participate in different activities/games etc, wherever their interest may lie"**

Young people are looking for ways to connect with other young people and their community, but programs and activities are often limited or disrupted due to a range of complex geographic and logistical challenges on the Inner Islands. The transient nature of staff and volunteers supporting youth led programs on the Inner Islands often causes initiatives to start and stop.

Additionally, short-term financial commitments limit opportunities for young people. For example, the last youth hub on Thursday Island closed in 2012 due to lack of ongoing funding for the facility and support for its volunteer coordinator.

To ensure continuity of support for young people, it is critical to identify sustainable long term solutions and investment.

Exploring and participating in a range of community activities is vital for young people to uncover their interests, develop new skills and build connections as they navigate their journey of personal growth and self-discovery. When young people are empowered with a strong sense of identity, they can design a life that reflects their cultural and personal values, as well as their individual goals.

Guiding Star 3

> **"(We need)..More activities for the older kids. So, they have something to do and won't result in bad behaviour because of boredom. More support and understanding for those older kids, because sometimes there's more to the story than what many of them are letting on"**

85% of young people stated a Youth Space should be established on Thursday Island

75% of young people want a Youth Space to be a safe place to be with friends

70% of young people enjoy fishing in their spare time

50% of young people want to participate in creative activities at a Youth Space

The key priorities for young people are:

1. Opportunities to come together with friends and peers in a safe environment.
2. Opportunities to explore and express culture, creativity and identity through the creative arts including storytelling, music, song, dance, visual arts, performing arts and film.
3. Opportunities to participate in organised sports - locally, regionally and nationally.
4. Opportunities to learn traditional skills and build cultural knowledge through camping, fishing and hunting.
5. Access to no or low-cost intra and inter-island transport to access services, work, arts and cultural activities and sport.

The above statistics are from the results of Zenadth Kes Youth Survey and should be interpreted and used with caution.

Guiding Star 4

Opportunities and Options

It's important for young people to learn, earn, contribute and feel good, with both formal and non-formal pathways serving as essential stepping stones on their journey.

On the Inner Islands, young people have varied experiences with school and work. Some thrive in mainstream educational and career pathways, finding clear direction and success. However, others can feel out of place, struggling with conventional systems that don't align with their needs, values, or aspirations.

The Torres Strait faces unique challenges when it comes to education and employment. The geographic isolation of the region along with the dispersion the islands, limited infrastructure and industries limits opportunities. Additionally, a transient workforce, socioeconomic factors, healthcare issues, lack of skills and training opportunities, discrimination, and transportation barriers create further challenges for young people.

It is crucial to address barriers to education and post-school opportunities by offering job and skills planning options, culturally appropriate systems and individual supports that accommodate diverse abilities, values, and goals, that go beyond the limits of Closing the Gap indicators.

When cultural mentors and activities are limited on the Inner Islands, young people may struggle to find purpose and be more vulnerable to boredom and self-destructive behaviours. This can lead to risky decisions that can affect the rest of their lives.

By providing a strong foundation of **Culture, Identity** and **Well-being** and a range of opportunities, young people have the capacity to make better choices. While some may wish to move to follow career paths or work opportunities, others may want to earn or contribute locally while remaining close to family and culture.

This includes the need for flexible employment that supports work and life balance to manage family responsibilities.

To improve the quantity and quality of jobs and experiences on the Inner Islands, it is essential to understand the current market and coordinate strategies that support employment, self-employment, remote work, and volunteer ecosystems on the Inner Islands.

There is an opportunity for government organisations, local service providers, and businesses throughout the region to work together on volunteer, work experience and traineeship programs supporting young people to gain experience and build confidence, and develop skills.

Additionally, training and employment opportunities on the mainland present valuable pathways to explore through sectors such as innovation, entrepreneurship, the arts, Indigenous tourism, renewable energy, climate change, disability and social services, and even through international events such as the 2032 Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The Information and Communication Technology sector also presents opportunities for digital inclusion, remote work, and economic growth however greater investment is needed to support better, and more reliable digital infrastructure in our communities. Simultaneously, with the rise of artificial intelligence, it is critical to ensure digital literacy and educational supports are available and accessible.

Nurturing young people and providing opportunities for them to live or return to the Inner Islands is important for the long-term economic, social, and environmental health of the Torres Strait.

When young people are actively included and offered flexible ways to learn, earn and contribute to their community, they feel a strong sense of purpose and pride.

Guiding Star 4

"(We need) More opportunities like courses for kids who finished high and don't know what to do after school"

"I will go to the mainland to study to be a nurse and I will return to look after my family and community on Hammond"

"Finding a job on TI (Thursday Island) is hard because there is limited availability"

"(I like my job because I can be) active and fit and interact with other people"

48% of young people said the biggest barrier to accessing work is a lack of confidence

30% of young people don't know who to ask for help to find work

The key priorities for young people are:

1. Participation in formal education environments that are deeply grounded in cultural ways of learning and living.
2. Access to quality, flexible employment and lifelong education pathways supported by training and mentoring.
3. Access to training, tools, and infrastructure to create new ideas to explore self-employment opportunities, entrepreneurship, and digital futures.
4. Support to explore non-formal learning to support the development of culture, knowledge, life skills, and competencies for alternate pathways.
5. Opportunities to develop every-day life skills such as communication, decision making, financial literacy, time management, self-care and digital literacy.

The above statistics are from the results of Zenadth Kes Youth Survey and should be interpreted and used with caution.

Guiding Star 5

Connected and Mobile

With 17 inhabited islands spread across an area of 48,000 square kilometres of ocean, many young people must leave their home islands behind and travel to Thursday Island or the mainland to attend high school. Others relocate after school for further education or employment, only returning for holidays or family and cultural obligations.

During this time, young people become part of the wider Torres Strait Islander diaspora community, which refers to the dispersion of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people from their traditional homeland to mainland Australian and beyond.

Navigating multiple cultures, also known as biculturalism, can be both rewarding and challenging, as young people learn to balance their own culture with the influences of the community they are living in.

Providing tailored and culturally responsive support for young people as they transition to and from communities is essential for nurturing their **Culture, Identity,** and **Well-being,** including their sense of belonging.

For young people living across communities, technology not only provides a vital link to their families and culture but also facilitates a two-way exchange of knowledge. This allows members of the diaspora community to share new experiences and insights with their home communities.

Supporting digital inclusion on the Inner Islands can enhance cultural connection and address issues of opportunity, access, knowledge, and skills. It has the potential to empower and support young people who wish to continue living in the Torres Strait through online education, health, innovation, business, employment, and volunteer opportunities.

A range of barriers in relation to digital inclusion, including infrastructure, high costs of services and devices, training challenges, lack of trained staff and volunteers, and dedicated spaces and equipment to learn must be addressed urgently.

Young people are interested in technology, using phones and laptops for education and social connection. However, they face challenges with the affordability of data, as well as concerns about online safety including social media use, cyberbullying and mental health issues.

With skills, training and support, digital tools can be safely used to support lifelong learning. They have the potential to foster new innovations, including culturally respectful technologies to help young people to learn and practice cultural knowledge and language.

Digital inclusion expands young people's options and opportunities, enabling them to participate in the global digital society while maintaining their connection to culture.

Guiding Star 5



When young people, their families and community are included in digital futures they can expand their options and opportunities.

- → Connect to and care for **Culture, Identity** and **Well-being**
- → Exchange knowledge
- → Learn, earn, contribute and live

The key priorities for young people are:

1. Access to quality digital infrastructure, skills development to enable participation in a global digital society.
2. Connect diaspora communities with traditional homelands for **Culture, Identity**, and **Well-being**, as well as to support for mutual knowledge exchange.
3. Support to develop digital knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to stay safe online.

Guiding Star 6

Holistic Health

Supporting the transitional period in a young person's life is vital for setting them up for their best life. For young people without access to basic needs or positive family and community mentors, overcoming health and well-being challenges can be even more difficult.

The majority of young people on the Inner Islands have experienced or know someone who has experienced discrimination, racism, bullying and/or cyberbullying. Challenges in their home and community environments, including substance misuse and domestic and family violence are also a significant concern for young people.

Certain groups of young people face higher threats to their well-being, based on discriminatory factors such as their culture, gender, sexuality, disability, and where they live.

Students identified that they are more likely to seek help from a friend than a service provider for issues relating to cyber bullying, self-harm, suicide ideation, abuse, domestic violence, bullying, and anxiety. However, they would go to a service provider for support with sexual health, alcohol and other drugs, and anger management.

Teachers that are trusted by students are likely to be sources of support for issues such as mental health, peer pressure, coercive control and informed consent.

A strength-based intersectional approach - based on equity, diversity and inclusion and holistic health - should be used when designing and delivering support for specific groups of young people across the region.

Young people's sense of well-being is deeply linked to their cultural identity and connection to community, and therefore requires tailored responses to support their unique needs that are culturally appropriate, inclusive and accessible.

Supporting young people's holistic health requires consideration of the multiple information and support sources young people access.

> **"I talk to myself and do calm things like go to the beach with my dogs and watch movies"**





Guiding Star 6

66% of young people believe alcohol and other drugs are the most significant problem they are facing

65% of young people said they would talk to friends or parent/relative/family member if they need help.

62% of young people said that bullying is a problem

43% of young people believe mental health is a problem for young people

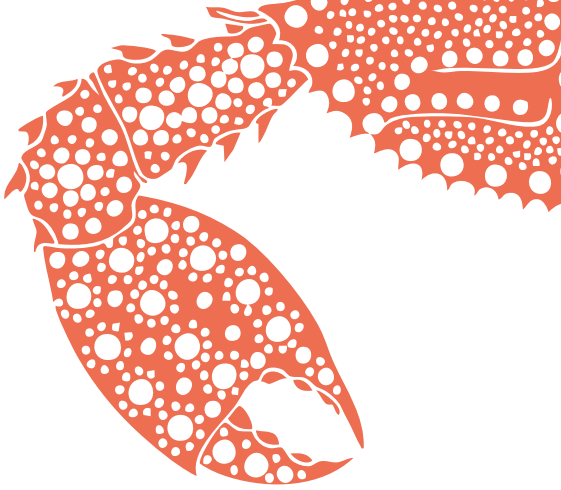
19% of young people said they would not ask for help

The key priorities for young people are:

1. Recognise and support information services for young people provided by their peers, family members and trusted community relationships.
2. Provide secure and confidential access to preventative health, sexual health, mental health and general health care services in discrete young people friendly spaces.
3. Promotion of safety and address bullying and violence in the home, school and community settings.
4. Support to navigate and exit the justice system and re-connect with family and community.
5. Acknowledge the skills, knowledge and work of women in maintaining societal health, safety and cohesiveness.

The above statistics are from the results of Zenadth Kes Youth Survey and should be interpreted and used with caution.

From Words to Action



Perhaps the greatest challenge is demonstrating to young people a commitment to taking immediate action while also addressing the systemic barriers faced by the region. This will require agreement, commitment and investment from service providers and all levels of government.

Importantly, a diverse group of young people must be meaningfully engaged, empowered and supported to participate and contribute in the design of solutions to issues that affect them.

Addressing systemic barriers

A number of organisations provide services to young people as part of their remit, some are Torres Strait-based and some are mainland-based. However, there is no regional organisation with specific responsibility to understand the needs of young people, develop programs, coordinate data collection and analysis, work across agencies to address need, and to advocate for resources and investment in the region.

To address the unique environmental, economic, and cultural contexts of the Islands, a consistent, coordinated and responsive approach must be established. This will ensure the continuity and cultural responsiveness of services, programs, and activities on the Inner Islands. This Strategy reflects:

1. Regular opportunities for young people to meaningfully engage in the review and co-design of programs, services, and activities; such as feedback forms, voting options, brainstorming workshops etc.
2. Data sharing across funding agencies and service providers to identify barriers and inform decisions, ensuring that programs are designed to be inclusive and accessible, particularly for priority groups.
    - → Ensure all service providers have feedback from priority groups embedded in KPIs.
3. Commitment to long-term funding commitments (proposed 5 years) to address barriers related to continuity, staffing, and transport.
4. Adaptability in funding agreements and service delivery arrangements to ensure services to young people can be provided in relaxed, culturally responsive, youth-friendly environments that are flexible to need and opportunity.
5. Developing youth leadership capability and skills:
    - → youth board traineeships
    - → youth governance training scholarships (AICD or similar)
    - → youth development scholarships (similar to TSRA women's development program)
    - → youth quotas to boards and decision-making bodies (non-executive or non-voting seats where applicable)

Initiatives for action

Five key initiatives were identified during the consultation process, each of which would have meaningful and measurable impact to meeting young people's needs and aspirations.

These priorities will be considered in a costed action plan to advocate to Commonwealth and State funding agencies and philanthropic bodies. This strategy will be used as an awareness and investment tool for seeking funding for



programs and services for all youth across the Torres Strait region.

These initiatives are considered priorities for action:

1. **Co-design and establish 'Youth-led Spaces'** on Thursday Island that includes access to culturally responsive programs, activities, information and resources driven by young people and in collaboration with community;
2. **Increase pooled investment** into organised sports, enabling clubs to recruit and support the essential 'people powered infrastructure' (coaches, officials, volunteers). In the first two years, focus on rugby league, basketball, netball, Australian Rules, and touch football.
3. **Establish free after-hours transport** from Hammond Island, Horn Island and Prince of Wales to Thursday Island for key youth opportunities (school holiday programs, training and workshops, sporting events, and key cultural events).
4. **Delivery of culture camps,** hosted by Traditional Owners and Elders which include learning language, cultural practices and traditions;
5. **Establish clear leadership and accountability** for developing, resourcing and monitoring action plans across all agencies to improve youth outcomes and meet Closing the Gap targets by 2031. This will require strong support from a range of organisations with a commitment to work collaboratively in partnership.

Monitoring progress and impact

The responsibility for servicing and supporting young people in the Torres Strait sits across multiple organisations, agencies, and all levels of government. Streamlining current funding and approaches and prioritisation of new investment will be crucial to deliver long-term benefits for our youth.

Therefore, an interagency approach is best placed to monitor the progress of commitments and actions, and measure the impact of *Youth Strategy* implementation over the next five years.

This could be undertaken through appropriate governance and reporting mechanisms, for example publishing an annual statement of achievement to ensure transparency and accountability to young people and the broader community.



Appendix 1

Zenadth Kes Youth Strategy: Looking Forward

The Zenadth Kes Youth Strategy is not just a document, it is a call from our youth and young people - grounded in their lived experiences, their strengths and their vision of a stronger, and better future. To transform this strategy from listening to meaningful action, we must commit to focussed **implementation,** transparent **accountability,** and **genuine partnerships**. This means working hand-in-hand with young people, community, local service providers, and across all levels of government to ensure every investment and initiative reflects the voices and aspirations of our youth people and addresses identified needs across the Torres Strait region and Northern Peninsula Area. This work requires unwavering commitment, transparent practices, mutual trust, innovative thinking and the cultivation of strong, healthy and respectful relationships.

The Zenadth Kes Youth Strategy offers a robust, evidence-based framework of strategic priorities that can be actively leveraged by diverse stakeholder groups to drive strategic, coordinated and meaningful outcomes for Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal young people in the region.

Now is the time to move beyond words - to stand with our young people, act with purpose, and drive real change for our communities. Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes all of us—families, Elders, communities, service providers, and governments - to uplift and empower all First Nations youth. Together, we can build a future where young people and their families are not just supported—they are equipped and empowered to lead as the changemakers of today and tomorrow.

Stakeholder	How to use the strategy
Young people from the region	→ Inform stakeholder and government priorities, actions and timeframes to achieve outcomes. → Advocate for what they want and need from their community, school, training and education providers, government, employers, service providers, and community organisations. → Create volunteer projects at school, TAFE, university, or community. → Explore and pursue start-up or small business opportunities that align with the objectives and priorities of the *Youth Strategy* and leverage funding opportunities.
Elders, families and communities	→ Advocate for young people and provide advice to governments, organisations, and stakeholders responsible for policy, program and service delivery that impact youth. → Work in partnership with stakeholders and service providers to guide, mentor and support young people to be grounded and strong in culture and identity. → Empower young people with the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to thrive in their homes, schools and communities – ensuring consistent, long-term support throughout the strategy's implementation and beyond.

Service Providers, Community Organisations	→ Lead proactive coordination and collaboration with other local service providers and community organisations to advance key priorities—focusing on tailored, place-based solutions and strategic partnerships. → Establish clear, accessible pathways for young people across the region, including the Northern Peninsula Area, to support long-term success.
Education Providers	Apply insights from *the Youth Strategy* to drive tangible improvements in young people's educational outcomes, ensuring targeted support that strengthens engagement, achievement and progression.
Employers	→ Leverage strategic insights to design meaningful training and employment opportunities, while enhancing workplace practices and environments to better support young people. → Create diverse career pathways and opportunities for young people across industries, equipping them with the skills to thrive in a modern and rapidly evolving workforce. → Support regional opportunities for flexible employment pathways and succession planning - including creating sustainable, full-time opportunities to enable young people to return to the region.
Torres Strait Regional Authority	→ Enable partnership approaches with local, state and other government partners and organisations to support implementation of the Zenadth Kes Youth Strategy. → Advocate for targeted and increased investment to accelerate progress on Closing The Gap targets and outcomes for young people. → Explore internal and external funding opportunities to support local projects and programs tailored to young people's and community needs.
Government and Policy Makers	→ Influence policy development and decisions at Local, State, and Commonwealth levels to secure sustained regional funding that delivers measurable short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes for young people. → Ensure young people are meaningfully engaged in identifying priorities and actively supported to participate in shared decision-making for policies, programs, and services that impact their lives.

Appendix 2

A Youth Space for the Inner Islands

The establishment and call for a Youth Space designed for young people on the Inner Islands has broad support from young people, service providers and the wider community. There is also general agreement that it should be based on Thursday Island (85% of survey respondents) and that after hours transport should be provided between Horn Island, Hammond Island and Prince of Wales Island.

Young people would like a Youth Space to be open and accessible on the weekends, after school/work and early evenings.

Young people are clear about their need and aspirations for a youth space:

- Primarily it would be a **safe place to be with friends (75% of survey respondents)**. A space where they could come together with other young people to connect, study and do activities outside of school.
- They would like to participate in **Fun activities (67% of survey respondents)** and **Creative activities (48% of survey respondents)**. Activities include art, music, sports, gaming and cooking. They would also like to **learn new things (44% of survey respondents)**.
- They would like access to both organised structured activities as well as have options to 'do my own thing'.
- They would like access to computers and technology, a gym, library, a cinema, and a beauty salon. They are aware that some of these facilities might not be possible due to cost.
- The design of a youth space would need to include quiet spaces, noisy spaces and a kitchen to cook traditional foods 'Kai Kai'.
- **Getting help with homework (29% of survey respondents) and getting confidential help (33% of survey respondents)** were also identified as priorities for young people.

Additionally, community representatives expressed a need for a youth space to provide essential wraparound services such as health and mental health support, school tutoring, career and employment assistance, and life skills training.

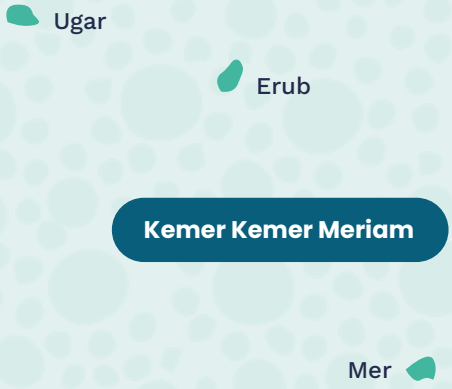
It will be critical that young people are central to the development of the Youth Space – both in terms of concept AND the detail of location, design and offering. There are numerous failed 'youth spaces' throughout Australia designed by well-meaning adults that fail because they did not collaborate with a diverse group of young people in the design process.

Appendix 3

Terminology

Term	Definition
Accessible	Making sure everyone has the same opportunities to access services, information, spaces and fully participate in their communities.
Advocate / Advocacy	Taking action to support a cause or address an issue that is affecting a person or community.
Agencies and Departments	Organisations and groups in the Australian Government responsible for different policies and programs.
Bi-Culturalism	Belonging to, representing, or understanding two different cultures.
Cultural Safety	Creating an environment that is safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This means there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity and experience.
Decision-making	The process of making choices about government policies and programs.
Digital Inclusion	Ensuring equitable, meaningful, and safe access to use, lead, and design of digital technologies, services, and associated opportunities for everyone, everywhere.
Inclusive	Ensuring everyone is valued and supported to participate, free from discriminatory beliefs, attitudes and practices.
Interagency	Collaboration and cooperation between multiple agencies/ organisations.
Lived experience	Personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement or experience.
LGBTIQ+SB	An abbreviation which is used to describe lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer, or any other sexually or gender diverse people, including Sistergirls and Brotherboys.
National Agreement on Closing the Gap	An Australian Government strategy that aims to reduce disparity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians on key health, education and economic opportunity targets.
Policies and programs	Plans and activities made by the Australian Government to address different issues or provide support to people.
Self-determination	The fundamental right of people to shape their own lives.
Strengths-based Intersectional Approach	A focus on recognising and leveraging individuals' unique strengths and identities while understanding how different aspects of social identity (such as race, gender, and class) intersect to influence their experiences and challenges.
Torres Strait Regional Authority	Lead Commonwealth agency for Indigenous affairs in the Torres Strait Region.
Young people	Young people are between the ages of 12-25.
Diaspora	Refers to the dispersion of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people from their traditional homeland to mainland Australian and beyond.


MOEGI DAUDAI
Boigu
Guda Maluygal
Dauan
Saibai
Iama
Masig
Mabuyag
Maluylgal
Badhu
Mua
Poruma
Kulkalgal
Warraber
Naghir
Kiriri
Waiben
Ngurupai
Kaiwalagal
Muralag
Seisia
Bamaga
KOEY DAUDAI



Appendix 4

About the Region

The Torres Strait Regional Authority

The TSRA is the lead Australian Government agency in the Torres Strait Region for Indigenous Affairs. It is a statutory agency that operates under the direction of a democratically elected Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal Board.

The Torres Strait Regional Authority's Torres Strait Development Plan 2023 – 2028 ('the Development Plan'), developed by the TSRA Board and local communities, sets TSRA's organisational vision and priorities.

The Torres Strait Region

The Torres Strait Region stretches 150 kilometres northwards from Cape York Peninsula to Papua New Guinea and up to 300 kilometres from east to west. It includes 5 Traditional Owner nations of Kaiwalagal, Maluylgal, Guda Maluygal, Kulkalgal and Kemer Kemer Meriam.

The map below shows the Inner Islands of Waiben (Thursday Island), Ngurupai (Horn Island), Kiriri (Hammond Island) and Muralag (Prince of Wales Island).

Ailan Kastom

The recognition of Ailan Kastom (island custom) is enshrined in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005 (Cth). Ailan Kastom means the body of custom, traditions, observance and belief of some or all of the Torres Strait Islanders living in the Torres Strait area, and includes customs, traditions, observances and beliefs relating to particular person, areas, objects or relationships.

Cultural Empowerment Principle

The Youth Strategy has been developed and delivered in accordance with the principle of cultural empowerment and respect to the cultural protocols of the Kaurareg peoples whose country covers the Inner Islands where most of high-school aged young people reside during school terms.


Australian Government


TORRES STRAIT REGIONAL AUTHORITY
TSRA
www.tsra.gov.au