



1 September 2014

Mr Howard Hobbs MP
Chair, Member for Warrego
Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee
Parliament House, George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Email: thlgc@parliament.qld.gov.au

To ~~Mr Hobbs~~ *Howard*,

The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) would like to provide a letter of submission in response to the Inquiry into Coastal Sea Freight which is currently being undertaken by the Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee.

As outlined by the public and community stakeholders at the Committee hearing held on Thursday Island on 20 August 2014, the needs and issues facing the twenty communities in the Torres Strait region are unique and challenging. The Torres Strait Regional Authority as the statutory Commonwealth representative for the region would like to take this opportunity to outline key issues which may be considered by the Committee as part of your inquiry.

Coastal shipping provides the primary means of freight into and within the Torres Strait region (limited air freight is the only alternative). The cost and availability of freight services directly impacts the cost of living and the quality of services available for communities. While road and rail congestion is not relevant in the Torres Strait context, the TSRA is supportive of the Committee's consideration of the benefits of 'weekly' coastal shipping services. In a competitive environment, coastal shipping can contribute to streamlined food supply chain solutions. The TSRA is supportive of the potential for freight subsidies to be introduced for the region, similar to those concessional loans and freight subsidies currently available to 16 Queensland shires under the National Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements. These loans and subsidies are provided to primary producers that deliver to remote island communities of regional Queensland such as Palm Island and Hopevale. Expansion of the scheme to the Torres Strait would have positive health outcomes for communities.

Another key issue facing Torres Strait communities is the limitations of existing infrastructure at key ports in the region. Current freight providers to the region utilise marine infrastructure that does not have capacity for large vessels, in turn causing substantial damage to essential marine infrastructure and limiting safe access points for communities. The construction and maintenance of wharves and barge ramps in the outer islands of the region have been funded by the TSRA and Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads. Upgrades may be required in the near future to sustain current services and manage larger vessels.

Cultural Tourism is also a largely undeveloped industry in the region. The potential for economic development of this industry is largely due to the cost of tourist transport to the region. An improved shipping service could provide an alternative to expensive air travel, reduce the high cost of living making it more affordable to the region's residents and attract more visitors to the region.

With an increase in shipping also comes an increase in risk to the region. The waters of the Torres Strait are a haven for marine life and critical to the livelihood of Torres Strait Islanders. The impact on the sea environment needs to be considered and the capacity of the region to respond to potential disasters such as oil spills. Providers in the region should be required to have the necessary specifications to ensure that if any accidents take place there would be minimal damage to the environment.



Australian Government



TSRA

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These should also be a concerted effort by all levels of Government to collaborate with the marine industry to develop and maintain sustainable jobs and careers for Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal People within these sectors.

Please contact TSRA Acting Program Manager Healthy and Safe Communities, Mary Bani on [REDACTED] or via email [REDACTED] if you require further information.

Yours Sincerely,



Joseph Elu
Chairperson
Torres Strait Regional Authority