

LAUNCH OF TORRES STRAIT LAND AND SEA MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

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THE ISLAND OF MER IN THE Torres Strait was the first place to secure native title recognition in *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)*. Since 1992 more than 20 Prescribed Bodies Corporate (PBCs) have been established in the Torres Strait to preside over their respective land and sea country. This includes the Sea Claim PBC Malu Lumar, which covers the 40,000 square kilometres of traditional marine estate in the Torres Strait.

Torres Strait Traditional Owners established Gur A Baradharaw Kod Torres Strait Sea and Land Council (GBK) in 2012 to act as a peak body to promote the collective interests of native title holders and to develop a culture of governance that aligns with Ailan Kastom. The directors of GBK comprise the Chairs of all the PBCs in the region.

GBK and the Torres Strait Regional Authority have recently endorsed the revised the *Land and Sea Management Strategy for Torres Strait* (2016-2036) ('the Strategy') and the Strategy was released earlier

this month (see www.tsra.gov.au). The Strategy aims to help Torres Strait communities work together to protect the people, sea, and land of the Torres Strait. The vision for the Strategy is:

Empowering Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal peoples to sustainably manage and benefit from their land, sea and cultural resources into the future, in accordance with Ailan Kastom, Aboriginal Lore/Law and native title rights and interests.

The new Strategy builds on the achievements of the 2005 *Land and Sea Management Strategy for Torres Strait* and further draws upon western science, management experience, and advice from Torres Strait Traditional Owners to determine the region's natural and cultural values and priorities. The development of the Strategy included extensive collaboration and consultation with a range of stakeholders. The planning process engaged Torres Strait Traditional

Owners and their representative organisations jointly determining the values, vision, and desired outcomes for the region's islands and sea.

The process involved a number of regional workshops and meetings. A draft Strategy was taken to a regional workshop held in September 2015 with input and feedback from this workshop used to revise the Strategy. Comment was then sought from all Ranger groups, RNTBCs, and other key regional stakeholders. In February 2016, a meeting was held with representatives from the five nation groups in Torres Strait represented by the GBK Working Group as well as Kaurareg, Gudang and Yadhaykenu Traditional Owners from Cape York. This meeting was to ensure that the Strategy aligned with Traditional Owner interests and priorities, and resulted in amendments to reflect the importance of Ailan Kastom and Aboriginal Law and Lore throughout the document. The TSRA Board then approved the final Strategy.

There are several key aspects to the Strategy: the identification and assessment of sixteen key values including a state of the environment regional report card, and the creation of island profiles summarising the key environmental features and management priorities of each island.

As its core, the Strategy identifies sixteen key values under the themes of people, sea, and land which make the Torres Strait unique. The Strategy details what each value is, its current condition, its desired outcomes, and the strategic management directions to be taken to achieve the desired outcomes. The current state of each of the key values was also assessed in the state of the environment regional report card included in the Strategy. The report card measures the current condition, significance, and level of threat to each value, identifies any trends in the value, and provides the level of confidence in information available based on qualitative assessment and professional judgement using available evidence.

As a part of the report card process, island community land and sea profiles were prepared for each of the 17 inhabited islands. The profiles outline key environmental features

and community management priorities of each island. The information in the profiles can be used to support local planning and decision-making, and as educational and promotional tools. The profiles will help communities better understand their unique circumstances and aid them in making informed choices about future priorities for land and sea management.

The report card will be updated every five years and the island profiles every three to five years, allowing for comparison of measures, priorities, and outcomes.

Strong foundations have been laid for partnerships with a range of organisations including native title holders, representative bodies, community members, government, research institutions, and industry. The Strategy will seek further opportunities for existing and potential partners to contribute time, resources and effort towards implementing the Strategy, particularly its Indigenous community-based management initiatives. The TSRA is also looking to collaborate with GBK to develop a model which will see a staged devolution of agreed land and sea management responsibilities to GBK and RNTBCs. This is in line with the intention with which GBK was set up.

The implementation of the Strategy will occur according to the guiding principles set out in the Strategy.

- **Be culturally appropriate** (reinforcing native title rights and interests, respecting Ailan Kastom and Aboriginal Law/Lore, incorporating Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and aligning with Traditional Owner interests)
- **Empower Traditional Owners** (supporting self-determination at the local and regional scale)
- **Deliver enduring outcomes** (providing environmentally, economically and socially sustainable solutions)
- **Adopt integrated decision making** (using evidence-based approach that takes a long-term holistic perspective and considers all relevant factors)
- **Demonstrate strong adaptive management** (applying flexible approaches that incorporate learning from experience)
- **Focus on protecting and managing key values** (keeping the unique features of Torres Strait secure for the benefit of future generations)

For further information, please visit www.tsra.gov.au or contact Ned David on maganmabaig@gmail.com

