

TORRES STRAIT REGIONAL AUTHORITY SUBMISSION

TO THE QUEENSLAND PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION INQUIRY INTO SERVICE DELIVERY IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

COMMITMENT REQUIRED FROM QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT

The Torres Strait Regional Authority seeks Queensland Government commitment to work together with the TSRA to drive an integrated approach to service delivery in Torres Strait.

As part of this commitment, it is essential that Queensland Government agencies delivering services in the Torres Strait treat Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) as core business and work in partnership with the TSRA and the region's three Local Governments towards addressing local and regional issues identified by local communities through their ISD Community Booklets as well as the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Regional Plan 2009-2029.

SERVICE DELIVERY

There are three levels of Government delivering programmes and services in the Torres Strait (Local, State and Commonwealth). A number of front line services are delivered by Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) who receive funding for these services from State and Commonwealth funding agencies.

One of the main challenges for service delivery in the Torres Strait is the geography of the region where island communities are spread out over 44,000 square kilometres of sea. This has a large impact on the cost of delivering for all stakeholders.

Due to this challenge, service delivery to the outer Torres Strait islands is sometimes not as timely, effective or at the same standard compared to those being provided on the main administrative centre of Thursday Island. Positive initiatives such as subsidised transportation, freight and airfare costs need to be ongoing in the region to mitigate the impact of these high costs.

There are some duplications and gaps in service delivery across all levels of Government as different agencies have their own programmes that in many cases aim to address the same issues and outcomes.

Many services are being delivered through single agency strategies that do not effectively address the complex whole of government solutions required to meet the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Closing the Gap targets, the Australian Governments Indigenous Advancement Strategy and regional community needs.

Whole of Government investment in the region should align with and address those plans and priorities already identified by communities in the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area.

This can be achieved through an integrated approach to service delivery between not only individual departments and agencies but also across levels of Government and sectors.

GOVERNANCE

One of the main challenges to decision making is State and Commonwealth agencies in the region operate as a regional office of their department with decisions and priorities largely being set by their central offices in either Brisbane (State) or Canberra (Commonwealth).

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A key aspiration of the region and its leadership is to work towards achieving Regional Governance to enable local/regional control and management of all Government and non-Government services and programmes being delivered in the region.

There is need to establish an Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) Forum/Committee with regional political leaders, high level Queensland and Commonwealth Government officials and Ministers overseeing the coordination of services and initiatives in the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area. This forum would decide on the delivery priorities for the region and ensure services and outcomes are delivered.

The establishment of the ISD Forum/Committee would be a positive practical step towards achieving the aspiration of Regional Governance.

Securing commitment from all stakeholders in the region to this approach is critical. Securing land tenure for services and projects while protecting the Native Title rights of Traditional Owners is one example that could make a positive impact.

FUNDING

The majority of non-government (NGOs) service providers and community organisations in the Torres Strait are not for profit and rely on Government funding to deliver services. This reliance has a major effect on the level, number and quality of services being delivered.

Local Government Councils in Torres Strait also continue to rely on Government funding for essential services and infrastructure due to a lack of their own income stream. Only one of the three Local Governments in the region has a rate base which they can draw on.

The Major Infrastructure Programme (MIP) is a positive example of a whole of Government delivery model that works. The MIP delivers essential environmental health infrastructure in communities and is funded by both the Queensland and Australian Governments.

To enable long term planning for essential infrastructure services across the region, there is a need for the State Government to work closely with the three Local Governments in the region on a whole-of-life investment plan for their infrastructure. The plan and the appropriate level of resources would support the local Governments to prioritise new infrastructure and maintain their current assets.

Infrastructure projects and services being delivered should, as a priority, provide opportunities for local indigenous employment via procurement and employment processes. Supporting Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area businesses will strengthen the regional economy and provide real job opportunities.

Without whole of stakeholder coordination, there is a real risk of funding duplication across Government Agencies and community project duplications amongst locally based organisations.

EVALUATION

Evaluation methods and reporting requirements differ between agencies/departments with some having more emphasis on output delivery and others that focus measurement on short and long term benefits.

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There is room for improvement in performance reporting as well as information sharing between departments on the success or otherwise of their programmes.

Many programme or project evaluations only look at the output level and do not assess the level of benefit to the community, organisation or region.

There is little evidence of either measurement or evaluation of activities being undertaken by stakeholders in the region to determine whether these are having a real impact on the level of disadvantage being experienced or demonstrating a return on investment for funding bodies.

This is a function that the regional ISD Committee could work on across all levels of Government to ensure data from the region demonstrates outcomes, benefits and impacts from the significant whole of Government investment being made into the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area.

There is also a need to establish an Indigenous Ombudsman Office in Queensland to ensure there is an independent umpire to make sure targets and outcomes are met by all stakeholders delivering services in the region.