

# Media Release

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## Torres Strait Traditional Owners seek meaningful change from Native Title

Traditional Owners from the Torres Strait are frustrated with Australia's native title process, calling for the post determination process to deliver meaningful change in communities at a meeting on Masig (Yorke) Island in April.

The meeting brought together native title holders from the Torres Strait from 28-30 April to discuss how practical outcomes can be achieved once native title has been recognised. Traditional owners expressed their continued frustration with the native title process post determination and felt that the legal recognition of native title rights and interests failed to deliver any meaningful changes to their communities.

"We need to give justice to our people," George Mye of the Erubam Le Traditional Land and Sea Owners (TSI) Corporation said. "We want transparency and a sense of order around how business is done," Terrence Whap from Goemulgaw (TSI) Corporation agreed.

The meeting agreed that educating visitors, non native title holders and other stakeholders in the region was the first step to building the authority of PBCs and respect for traditional owners. They agreed on a set of shared principles for engagement with other stakeholders reiterating that *Ailan Lore* and *Kastom* need to be respected at all times and that PBCs need to be consulted on all matters that relate to their land and sea.

"Traditional owners have the most knowledge and understanding about the land and sea areas in the Torres Strait and can provide the most authoritative and accurate responses to any consultations," the PBC representatives declared.

"PBCs are the culturally and legally recognised entity that can assist with the coordination and communication of any land and sea matters within all native title areas."

Horace Baira from Mura Badulgal (TSI) Corporation said that people who do not understand how traditional laws and customs operate on the island communities should consult PBCs before carrying out activities that affect their native title lands. Pastor Jack Billy from the Porumalgal (TSI) Corporation said that there was no real recognition and that the State Government "is not faithful to its consent determination recognising the traditional owners of the Torres Strait".

Many participants agreed that the recent amendments to the *Torres Strait Islander Land Act 1991* (Qld) were made with inadequate consultation with Traditional Owners.

“The amendments enable PBCs to hold land in trust for their communities, but they also remove the need for an act of parliament before land can be compulsory acquired for infrastructure on the island communities,” the meeting declared.

“The inability of PBCs to engage in meaningful negotiations has been a key factor limiting opportunities for development in the region despite having legal recognition of exclusive possession over their native title lands.”

The PBCs said they want to use their land and natural resources effectively to provide benefits to the community and the region as a whole through agriculture, tourism and other local businesses on their islands.

The PBC representatives felt that it is important to clarify governance roles in the region. Dan Mosby from the Kulkagal (TSI) Corporation said that there is a need to reach an understanding with the Torres Strait Island Regional Council ‘they need to know what our role is, they need to understand our representative roles’.

It was the second meeting of the prescribed bodies corporate (PBCs) of the Torres Strait, providing Traditional Owners with an opportunity to meet and develop a culturally appropriate strategic plan to raise their profile and authority and bring economic development to their communities.

**Media contact:**

George Mye  
(07) 4069 4009

