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10 April 2018

Senator James Patterson
Chairperson
Senate Standing Committee on Finance and
Public Administration Legislation Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Attention: Ann Palmer, Secretary
Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

Inquiry into the provisions of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander amendment (Indigenous Land Corporation) Bill 2018; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Land and Sea Future Fund Bill 2018; and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land and Sea Future Fund (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2018

Dear Senator Patterson,

Thank you for inviting the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) to make a submission to the above inquiry.

The Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) consulted with the TSRA Board at their Board Meeting on 6 September 2017 in relation to the sustainability of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land Act and amendments to legislation that would support water related activities.

The TSRA Board supported both the proposed changes to legislation based on the following.

Sustainability of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land Account.

The Torres Strait region is one of the most sparsely populated regions in Australia. The geography of the region influences the TSRA's capacity to deliver to the Torres Strait region.

There are challenges for the Torres Strait region that include

- The cost of delivering services and infrastructure is significantly higher than most other areas in Australia due to the air and sea travel and freight costs;
- Both economic development initiatives and infrastructure development are impacted by complex land tenure arrangements;
- Economic stability and growth are essential to reduce welfare dependence and assist people to become economically independent.

The sustainability of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land Account is important to assisting the TSRA to secure recourse in progressing development in the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area region.

Water Related Activities

In relation to water related activities, Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people of the Torres Strait continue to practice traditional land and sea management in accordance with Ailan Kastom and Aboriginal Lore/Law and native title rights and interests. For Torres Strait Islanders, the special relationship with land extends to the sea and the economic, social, cultural and environmental values that the sea brings to their lives.

The Torres Strait still faces challenges that include:

- The adaption to sea temperature and sea level rise;
- Advancement towards 100 percent ownership of Torres Strait fisheries by Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people;
- Marine infrastructure development within Torres Strait communities.

The resources from the sea in the Torres Strait region provide the primary, and in some cases, the only opportunities for economic development in Torres Strait communities. The expansion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land Account and relevant legislation to resource water related activities would assist the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area region to address some of the ongoing challenges and increase opportunities for marine related industries.

Your sincerely,

Mr Napau Pedro Stephen AM
TSRA Chairperson