



Queensland Nurses' Union

Inquiry into Matters Relating to The Torres Strait Region

Submission to
the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence
and Trade Committee

March, 2010



Introduction

The Queensland Nurses' Union (QNU) welcomes the opportunity to provide a brief submission to the Inquiry into Matters Relating to the Torres Strait Region.

The QNU is the principal health union operating in Queensland. It is registered in this state and in the federal industrial relations jurisdictions as a transitionally registered association. In addition, the QNU operates as the state branch of the federally registered ANF.

The QNU covers all categories of workers that make up the nursing and midwifery workforce in Queensland including registered nurses, midwives, enrolled nurses and assistants-in-nursing employed in the public, private and not-for-profit health sectors. Our members work across a variety of settings from single person operations to large health and non-health institutions, and in a full range of classifications from entry level trainees to senior management, and nurse and midwife practitioner positions.

Health Service for the People living in the Torres Strait Region

We note that one of the terms of reference is to enquire into the extent of co-operation with, and between, Australia's northern neighbours, Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Indonesia, in relation to the health, welfare and security of the Torres Strait region and communities in and around this region.

In February, 2009, the QNU wrote to the Federal Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon Nicola Roxon, to express concern over a number of serious issues related to the health treatment provided to the people of PNG and the Torres Strait (Attachment A). In particular we highlighted two issues - the continuing lack of clarity about the level of support provided to PNG nationals visiting Australian territory in the Torres Strait and the inadequate provision of basic medical equipment to PNG health services.

The QNU believes that the federal government needs to provide a clear strategy and associated funding to meet the demand for health services placed on Queensland Health (QH) run centres by PNG nationals visiting the islands. The lack of clarity on whether the federal government intends to increase funding to QH in order to meet these needs has not as yet been decided. Meanwhile, remote area nurses and other health workers providing these essential services in very remote areas continue to work in unsustainable and unfair situations.

We also support federal government funding (e.g. overseas aid programs) for PNG that is specifically targeted to the provision of basic medical equipment such as gloves to protect patients and health workers.

The QNU recognises that these are complex health, foreign affairs and overseas aid issues that cross a number of jurisdictional and portfolio boundaries. As we are yet to receive a comprehensive co-ordinated response to the matters we raised in our previous correspondence, we take this opportunity to reiterate our concerns.