

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing to you as a concerned Torres Strait Islander citizen, who was born and educated on Thursday Island, regarding a number of critical issues relating to the lives and livelihood of my people in the Torres Strait Archipelago that needs to be brought to the forefront.

The illegal influx of Papua New Guineans into the Islands of the Torres Strait, currently there are literally thousands of Papua New Guineans residing illegally on the islands of the Torres Strait, particularly on Yam Island, Darnley Island, Badu Island and possibly Yorke Island and Saibai. The Torres Strait Treaty allows people from PNG to trade at the top Islands of the Torres Strait and after trading they are to return to PNG, however, many do not go back. Many have taken up residence all over the Islands of the Torres Strait and are utilising the scarce resources of Torres Strait Islanders, such as housing, employment, welfare and health services.

I understand that people of PNG have illegally taken up residence in the Torres Strait due to poverty and I do feel for them, but the burden should not be placed on the shoulders of Torres Strait Islanders, but on the PNG and Australian Governments.

Torres Strait Islanders are a tiny minority within a minority of Indigenous Australians, approximately 53,000 only in the world and we are already suffering from chronic diseases and dying well before our time, our health care facilities are stretched to the max and many Torres Strait Islanders live in crowded accommodation of up to three generations of families living in a three to four bedroom households due basically to no housing. A couple of years ago, approximately 100 new houses were built on Badu Island, but most were given to PNG people. Yet, again, six coastal villages in PNG were involved in violent fighting and houses were torched and burnt to the ground and people were threatened with machetes and the cause of the fighting was about, "who will have access to the Torres Strait".

Our hospital on T.I. have many non-Indigenous trainee doctors and nurses who come up to do their first stint in a remote area and are often still inexperienced.

The Queensland Health Medivac Team in the Torres Strait who are employed to attend to the health needs of Torres Strait Islanders are flying their helicopter to the coastal villages of PNG and bringing the sick to be cared for at the Thursday Island Hospital. I was on Thursday Island in December 2008 and saw many sick PNG people in the T.I. Hospital and basically all of the beds in the Childrens Ward was full and all of the Children were from PNG.

This raises many concerns, one of the biggest one is the spread of Tropical diseases that are not found in the Torres Strait but exists in PNG and are now being brought into the Torres Strait by PNG patients who are being treated at T.I. hospital. The other, as mentioned is the resources that are already scarce up there and the number of beds available to treat Torres Strait Islanders. This burden should not be ours but the Australian and PNG governments.

Australia has arrested many illegal boat people who have been sent to the Detention Centre on Christmas Island and yet they are turning a blind eye to the illegal

migration of Papua New Guineans into Australian Waters to the Torres Strait, this has been going on for Decades. These issues are critical and needs to be addressed immediately as the lives and livelihood of Torres Strait Islanders are at stake.

As a matter of urgency, there needs to be a thorough investigation carried out on **all** of the islands of the Torres Strait to identify those Papua New Guineans who are residing there illegally and for how long. And then some plan of action needs to be taken to either send them back or provide support for them and their families on Mainland Australia.

This is my submission to you and I hope it will be given serious consideration,

Yours sincerely,