



Stocking the shops in the Torres Strait and the Cape York Peninsula

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs will be visiting island communities in the Torres Strait and the peoples of Bamaga, Aurukun and Kowanyama to talk food and freight in its inquiry into remote community stores in the coming week.

Torres Strait islanders have a proud history as hunters, fishers and gardeners and a respectful relationship with their natural resources. At the same time their islands are not all suited to gardening, and fishing is seasonal. Once traditional trading with the Papuans would have filled the gap but now they must rely on their local store for the bulk of their supplies.

In Zenadth Kes, as the Torres Strait is known locally, 18 communities live on small islands relying on one barge a week to supply the shop with fresh food supplies. Some have no shop and no barge at all. Across Cape York most food comes from Cairns but is often sourced from further south or flown in from Darwin. In Kowanyama, for example, when the wet season sets in for half the year food only arrives by air drop.

The Committee has heard of a 'boxing day sale' atmosphere as fresh fruit and veg are seized in the shop on 'barge day' and of cauliflowers going at \$12 for half in remote areas.

Commenting on the situation Committee Chairman Richard Marles MP has said:

"Food security can be a huge challenge for small isolated Indigenous communities. The cost of fuel, freight and refrigeration is cumulative, and by the time food reaches a remote community it is far more expensive and far less fresh than it would be in far wealthier urban regions.

The Committee members are thankful to remote communities in the Torres Strait and Far North Cape York for receiving us to conduct public hearings and community meetings to hear first hand about their challenges and how they might be addressed.'

Public hearings: Monday 30 March 2009 – Thursday 2 April 2009

30 March Waiben (Thursday) Island
31 March Badu (Mulgrave) Island – Masig (Yorke) Island
1 April Mer (Murray) Island – Northern Peninsula Area
2 April Aurukun – Kowanyama

For media comment, please contact the Committee Chair Mr Richard Marles on (03) 5221 3033 **For background information**, contact the Committee Secretariat on (02) 62774559 or atsia.reps@aph.gov.au