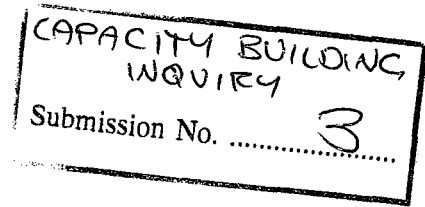




TORRES STRAIT REGIONAL AUTHORITY



The Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander Affairs
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

30 July 2002

Dear Secretary

Invitation to make submission to Parliamentary Inquiry Capacity Building in Indigenous Communities

Thank you for inviting the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) to submit its response to the Terms of Reference for Capacity Building in Indigenous Communities.

Please find attached the TSRA's response to the Terms of Reference.

Should you wish to discuss our response further please contact my General Manager Mike Fordham or myself on 07 4069 0700.

Yours sincerely

Terry Waia
Chairperson

Torres Strait Regional Authority

Capacity building in Indigenous communities

**Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs**

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Capacity building for Indigenous Communities

1. Executive Summary

In making this submission to the inquiry into capacity building for Indigenous communities, the TSRA seeks to assist the committee by providing a background to the experience of the Authority since its creation and relate that experience to developing strategies to assist Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people better manage the delivery of services within their communities.

While the creation of the TSRA was specific to a discrete regional and cultural situation, it has demonstrated that establishing an effective, representative and accountable framework of governance is an integral part of service delivery, whether or not such services are delivered by government or non-government organisations.

Because of its historical development and present circumstances, the Torres Strait can be seen as a microcosm, on a regional basis, of the issues impacting on the well being of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people.

The Region can be likened to a federation of island communities. Each island community is self managing through its own community government. With Commonwealth funding, the TSRA coordinates planning and service delivery with a single integrated regional voice and works in partnership with other Government agencies.

Many communities are still at what might be called the developmental stage. They have limited internal resources and are dependent on continuing government assistance at levels established historically.

One of the TSRA's advantages has been that it integrates Commonwealth, State and local government decision-making and operates within a legislative framework which recognises *Ailan Kastom*.

1.1 Setting Directions

The TSRA – like ATSIC – does not provide services directly. It is a lead agency for ensuring strategic direction in the provision of services with a budget that enables it to fund organisations, including community councils, and to improve the delivery of services through agreements negotiated within its jurisdiction. Its legislative independence enables it to re-design programs to match local circumstances.

Public investment in services for Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people is essential to treating them equitably and to fostering sustainable development in their own communities. It aims to improve the quality of lives through better access to services, achieving outcomes in key areas of need and disadvantage, promoting economic participation, and achieving critical outcomes by improving services and developing community assets and capacity, and promoting economic participation.

Strategies to assist Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginals better manage the delivery of services within their communities must be based on an acknowledgment of the broad historical and underlying disadvantage of Australia's Indigenous population which they continue to face every day of their lives.

1.2 Raising Standards

Achievement of improved outcomes will result from recognition that the overall health of Indigenous communities is the result of a convergence of effort and programs by Commonwealth, State and local government, requiring effective mechanisms of decision-making and coordination. Such recognition must ensure that Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginals enjoy no lesser a standard of service than other Australians.

Future strategies, therefore, should promote the twin objectives of raising their standard of living and promoting the sustainable development of Indigenous communities as an integral part of Australia's social fabric. Institutions of governance can contribute to the way needs are assessed and funding is targeted to meet that need.

The Torres Strait region is culturally distinct and has a history of disadvantage in its standards of housing, infrastructure, health, education, employment and economic development.

1.3 Working with government

The experience of the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) is that sustainable development occurs when governments provide funds and expertise in a genuine partnership with communities, one that recognises the capacity of communities to determine their own needs, determine priorities and measure outcomes. The decision-making and development planning processes in the Torres Strait give weight to these considerations.

Partnerships and funds available from all spheres of Government have contributed to overcoming disadvantages in health, education, employment and economic development, housing, infrastructure, community development, social programs and indigenous administrative support. Making progress on all of the key indicators of need at the same time is mutually reinforcing, and leads to positive interactive outcomes.

The TSRA has built on a number of strengths developed from previous years and has taken new initiatives to enable it to become more independent and more effective as a regionally based and focused organisation with statutory powers of planning, coordination, funding and reaching agreements with other stakeholders to support it. It has been able to do this because of its legislative independence as a statutory authority.

For major funding commitments, tripartite agreements between the Commonwealth and State Governments and the indigenous community provide the best model for the identification of need and the efficient and effective use of funds on a pooled basis.

1.4 A comprehensive approach

The need for funding flexibility and joint planning favours a comprehensive approach to the determination of outcomes. This takes account of the interrelatedness of activities as they impact on the well being of Indigenous communities. Improved outcomes are better achieved through the discretion inherent in a comprehensive approach, where adjustments can be made within block funding.

Increasing the financial and administrative capacity of regional governance and Indigenous organisations delivering services is a fundamental aspect of capacity building. In circumstances where funding is limited, efficiency and effectiveness are assisted through coordination arrangements under the control of Indigenous people.

As a lead agency in the Torres Strait, the TSRA fulfils this role with direct participation by communities and recognition by agencies implementing programs in the Torres Strait, a recognition that increases as service providers seek to improve their own performance through negotiation and cooperative arrangements. This provides the classic “winner” for all, where Government maximise output, improve outcome and are seen by the wider Australia community to be “doing the right thing”. The people of Torres Strait then benefit due to enhanced service, better housing increased employment and so forth.

2. Service delivery

Improving quality of life and ensuring that Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people they have greater control over and can take responsibility for their community development are cornerstones of community development strategies.

A significant element in these arrangements is the achievement of outcomes across the full spectrum of Indigenous life – health, education, employment, housing, community services and economic development. Achieving these outcomes necessarily requires significant outlays to overcome historical deficiencies and backlogs in service delivery and provision. It is essential that the process is managed efficiently.

2.1 Performance through partnerships

Past efforts and expenditures have significantly contributed to improved outcomes in recent years. Partnerships between our communities and State and Commonwealth government agencies promise appreciable and measured improvement in the quality of our lives in the next ten years.

Governments have demonstrated increased willingness to enter into partnerships with indigenous people to get results and to return to Indigenous people responsibility for their outcomes. Indigenous communities acknowledge the need to be accountable for such assistance and to embrace new approaches to funding and governance. Institutional arrangements have been and are continuing to be strengthened to provide better results.

The provision of services is the result of a mix of responsibilities and funding arrangements between the Commonwealth, State and local government, pivotal to which is the role of Indigenous organisations and, in particular, ATSIC and TSRA.

Notwithstanding that local government is a State responsibility, with Commonwealth financial assistance, the TSRA as the regional governance body supplements the operations of community local government as part of its commitment to integrated planning and service delivery, recognising the holistic nature of Indigenous development.

In the case of the Torres Strait, three key issues clearly emerge:

- The Torres Strait region, its people and its future must be seen in the context of a history of disadvantage and cultural distinctiveness. The region is remote, and falls behind mainland Australia in the standard of its housing, infrastructure, health and education facilities
- At the same time, the region can point to considerable achievement in improving services to and the quality of life of Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people in recent years. This has come about as a result of a

coordinated effort between all spheres of Government, aided by the creation of the TSRA as an instrument of that coordination and funding;

- The region has demonstrated what can be achieved through a properly resourced administration and an effective governance structure and the opportunity for the people of the Torres Strait to significantly participate in the design, delivery and evaluation of programs and services.

2.2 Standard of Service and needs

We argue that the standard level of service against which the needs of indigenous people should be assessed should be the national average standard of services provided to all persons in Australia. This would be readily measurable and provide equitable treatment of indigenous persons in the provision of government services.

Use of a standard based on the entire Australian population is consistent with the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsement of the *National Commitment to Improved Outcomes in the Delivery of Programs and Services for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders* (December 1992). That agreement seeks to ensure that indigenous Australians receive no less a provision of services than other Australian citizens.

On all the available evidence, any collation of statistics will justify the needs of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people relative to the Australian average. It is in the public interest in support of strategies to demonstrate why the expenditure of public funds on indigenous people is required and the extent of that requirement in relation to Australian average standards.

2.3 Priority on Outcomes

The provision of services must be seen in the context of what the people of the Torres Strait desire for themselves. In other words, the outcomes they seek.

The nature and structure of governance in the Torres Strait are such that the outcomes occur at two levels:

- The region
- Individual communities

The vision of the TSRA as expressed in its corporate plan is:

- To empower our people to determine their own affairs based on our unique Ailan Kastom blong Torres Strait from which we draw our unity and strength.

Within that context, the goals of the TSRA are:

- Gain recognition of our rights, customs and identity as Indigenous peoples;
- Achieve a better quality of life for all people living in the Torres Strait Region;
- Develop a sustainable economic base;
- Achieve better health, and community services;

- Ensure protection of our environment; and
- Assert our native title to the lands and waters of the Torres Strait region.

The programs and activities of the TSRA are built around the achievement of these goals.

Decisions are made in the context of funding arrangements between it, the Commonwealth and State Governments, and assistance for community and local government.

The fundamental point the TSRA wishes to make is that the interrelatedness of problems associated with the situation of Indigenous people requires holistic solutions, and, therefore, the provision of services and funding should be on the same basis.

The issue is significant for the TSRA in describing its functions, funding and priorities. The funding mix differs as follows:

- Housing and infrastructure
 - Primary responsibility of State and local government with the TSRA participating on the basis of agreements and pooled funding arrangements.
 - A central element is the TSRA's Community Housing and Infrastructure Program and the Environmental Health program.
- Joint Torres Strait Housing and Infrastructure Committee (JTSHIC)
 - The availability of adequate housing and associated infrastructure remains a significant problem for the Torres Strait despite concerted efforts by ATSIH and other agencies to address the issues. JTSHIC, aims to assist the assessment of programs against agreed performance indicators and published targets, giving a new degree of transparency to housing and infrastructure provision that would promote greater confidence and stability within the region's communities.
- Health
 - A State responsibility with the Commonwealth also providing funding Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal medical services to provide primary health care.
 - Health is the subject of an agreement between the Commonwealth, State and TSRA
- Education
 - A State function, with assistance from the Commonwealth Government
 - Education Framework Agreement

The TSRA is also a signatory to the Torres Strait District Framework Agreement on Education and Vocational Education, which aims to support the achievement of improved educational, training and employment outcomes in the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area and is based on a commitment to shared responsibility for educational outcomes. The Agreement provides for the communities of

the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area to have greater influence over the direction and delivery of education and vocational education and training in these communities. Meetings are held quarterly and the TSRA Portfolio member Education and training attends these meetings on behalf of TSRA.

- Employment and training
 - The main TSRA focus is Community Development Employment Projects, representing some 50 per cent of the TSRA's total budget.
 - CTP program, work closely with DET, DETYA and TSIREC.

The experience of the TSRA suggests that the broader the description of a function, the more likely improved outcomes are likely to be achieved for Indigenous communities. While sub programs are important in providing a focus on activity, the need for funding flexibility and joint planning favour a comprehensive approach. Outcomes are better achieved through the discretion inherent in a comprehensive approach, where adjustments can be made within block or pooled funding, at the regional level. Decision making must be developed to the regional level, as must the capacity to implement decision.

3. Governance Arrangements

Governance arrangements are important in improving the management of service delivery in the Torres Strait. The Torres Strait was the first, and so far is the only, Regional Council under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act to be translated into a Regional Authority. In both the creation of the Authority and the recognition by the High Court of traditional rights over their land, the Torres Strait has become an administrative model for Indigenous people.

The Torres Strait Regional Authority is a statutory authority which was established under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989* following a review of the Act. The review recognised the cultural unity of the Torres Strait and proposed the creation of a separate Torres Strait Authority with the similar powers as ATSIC. Creation of the Authority was seen as a significant step towards greater autonomy for the Region.

TSRA's operating budget for 2001-2002 was \$49.8 million, including a Commonwealth Government appropriation of \$48.8 million. Just over half of the appropriation was spent on Community Development Employment Projects. The remainder represented program and administrative expenditure.

The TSRA comprises 20 elected members representing Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people living in the Region. The majority of its membership is derived from Island Council chairpersons elected under *the Queensland Community Services (Torres Strait) Act 1984*.

These chairpersons are also members of the Island Coordinating Council, a State instrumentality responsible for matters to do with the outer Islands. TSRA and the

ICC work cooperatively together and their activities complement each other. In essence, the ICC is one of the key service delivery agencies of the TSRA.

TSRA provides grants to each community council for operating costs, based on the size of each council. These funds complement other financial assistance and direct grants available to the councils.

A typical council receives TSRA assistance for CDEP wages and capital/recurrent costs, a contribution to operating costs, assistance with community training, broadcasting and for specific projects, such as sports and recreation, community halls, and the establishment of community enterprise initiatives.

In addition the TSRA contributes to the operations of the Island Coordinating Council (\$8.143million in 2001-2002), and utilised its services to undertake major infrastructure projects, and the upgrading of water supplies throughout the Islands.

A Commissioner elected by TSRA members represents the TSRA on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal Affairs in its report *A New Deal* proposed further steps towards autonomy for the Torres Strait, involving the creation of a Regional Assembly based on an open franchise, the amalgamation of the TSRA and the ICC under joint Commonwealth-State legislation, and the creation of a House of Elders as custodians of traditional authority.. The recommendations of the Committee are now the subject of wide consultations in the Torres Strait.

3.1 Budget outcome

The present outcome for which the TSRA is funded and against which its performance is judged is:

“To achieve a better quality of life and to develop an economic base for Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal persons living in the Torres Strait.”

The TSRA makes a contribution to this outcome through six output groups:

- (a) economic development
- (b) community development, employment and training
- (c) Native Title
- (d) social and cultural development
- (e) housing and environment health infrastructure
- (f) Policy and Information

As part of the process of review, the TSRA has sought to:

- consolidate the outcomes of community planning processes associated with the three-year budget cycle;

- review the priorities and strategies in the existing development plan against progress in the last three years;
- consult with Queensland Departments and other Commonwealth agencies on the provision of services and any new initiatives proposed for the Torres Strait.

3.2 Coordination and integration

The Torres Strait Regional Authority's approach has been one of coordination and integration of individual programs and services. To achieve this it has entered into specific functional funding agreements with the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments. This is in accordance with the provisions of Part 3A of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989*. In particular:

s. 142A (1) (f) empowers the Authority to advise the Minister on:

- (ii) the coordination of the activities of other Commonwealth bodies that affect Torres Strait Islanders, or Aboriginal persons, living in the Torres Strait area;

s. 142C (1) c. empowers the Authority to negotiate and cooperate with other Commonwealth bodies and with State, Territory and local government bodies; and (d) to enter into agreements with a State or Territory.

The Torres Strait Regional Authority places considerable emphasis on the need for effective planning and coordination in accordance with the principles of the *National Commitment to Improved Outcomes in the Delivery of Programs and Services for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*.

Consequently, an important outcome has been the development of bilateral agreements between Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments. Queensland has established agreements with the Commonwealth in relation to health, education and housing and infrastructure in the Torres Strait Region, along with our role in the Torres Strait Treaty, one of the key piece of legislation. The Torres Strait Regional Authority has also been working with State and Commonwealth fisheries to develop an appropriate management consultative structure for Torres Strait fisheries.

Governments need to be responsive to the needs and priorities established by the communities themselves. TSRA planning objectives are focused in this direction to ensure that communities have the capacity to take greater responsibility for their own development goals.

4. The planning framework

The Torres Strait Regional Authority places great emphasis on strategic frameworks and agreements and working in cooperation with all spheres of government. These agreements, in themselves, are the result of an assessment of need.

Because of the involvement and interaction of a number of players, there is general agreement that the delivery of services to Indigenous communities needs to be based on planning, coordination and agreed strategies.

The *National Commitment* continues to provide a strategic framework for the development of partnerships between government at all levels and Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people.

Against the background of agreements entered into as a result of that commitment, it would seem that the National Commitment remains as relevant today as it was when it was first signed. The principles of the agreement have had significant outcomes in the Torres Strait.

The National Commitment confirmed that the planning and provision of government programs and services to Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal peoples was a shared responsibility and a legitimate policy interest of all spheres of government.

The National Commitment agreed on key principles and national objectives, the roles and responsibilities of Commonwealth, State and local government, and provided a framework for bilateral agreements between governments for the delivery of specific programs and services. It has encouraged better planning, coordination and delivery of services and, more recently, pooled funding arrangements to achieve better outcomes.

In more recent times, the TSRA and ATSIC have come to play a significant role in the negotiations and in the distribution of supplementary funding under agreed arrangements.

4.1 Whole of government approach

A key element in the TSRA's approach is the Torres Strait Development Plan.

Section 142D of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989* requires the TSRA to formulate and revise from time to time a Torres Strait Development Plan. The aim of the plan is to improve the economic, social and cultural status of Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal persons living in the Torres Strait area.

The plan is an essential part of the TSRA's operations, incorporating the involvement of all agencies and not just the TSRA's own programs.

There is recognition that capacity building is an important component in any plan, the initial focus of which would be in respect of Island councils as an integral part of achieving the Torres Strait's development goals.

A regional planning framework must shift future planning and development towards a realistic appraisal of the circumstances of the Torres Strait and practical outcomes, with a focus on the circumstances and capabilities of each island community.

Essential elements of this focus include the enhancement of the internal economies of each island, investment in works and services, access to programs, the limitations and potential opportunities of economic development, and the development of individual capabilities.

The basic framework is already in place with a system of community development plans, which can now be incorporated into a more comprehensive approach to development planning and the capacity required within the TSRA to promote it.

The TSRA has established an Economic Development Working Group, which is to consider future development opportunities on a coordinated and integrated basis with other stakeholders.

Implementation of these initiatives will be supported by the TSRA's statutory coordinating role.

The Torres Strait Development Plan has provided a strategic framework for the operations of the TSRA and for considering Torres Strait issues on a regional basis, recognising the need to take account of the activities and responsibilities of all government agencies and local government.

In its present form, the Development Plan describes the operations of the TSRA, sets out the vision and goals for the Torres Strait, describes the physical and operating environment, and identifies seven key issues. These issues are:

- Health
- Housing and Infrastructure
- Economic Development
- Environment
- Culture and Society
- Education and Training
- Native Title and Greater Autonomy

The Development Plan sets out the following goals:

- Gain recognition of our rights, customs and identity as Indigenous people;
- Achieve a better quality of life for all people living in the Torres Strait;
- Develop a sustainable economic base;
- Provide better health and community services;
- Ensure protection of our environment; and
- Assert our native title to the lands and waters of the Torres Strait

4.2 Improving planning effectiveness

The TSRA has taken new initiatives to improve its effectiveness as a regionally based and focused organisation with statutory powers of planning, coordination, funding and reaching agreements with other stakeholders.

The TSRA's budget is now framed on a three-year funding cycle. While the Development Plan is not a budget, it represents a framework within which the annual budget and the three-year funding cycle are framed.

The TSRA is now taking steps, following a review of the planning process by the Office of Evaluation and Audit, to introduce a more comprehensive approach to the preparation of the Development Plan and on-going monitoring of its implementation.

The OEA report observed that it would be very beneficial if the TSRA could receive a report annually on the programs, and the outcomes from them, of all Commonwealth and Queensland agencies which provide services/programs to Torres Strait Islanders, and Aboriginal persons, living in the Torres Strait area.

The benefit to the TSRA would be knowing what money is being spent in the Torres Strait, what it is being spent for and what it has achieved. If, on receipt of such information, the TSRA Board is not satisfied with either the level of funding provided or the outcomes achieved, it would then be in a good position to make representations to the responsible government.

There is general endorsement that a whole of government approach remains the best way to ensure maximum effort. An annual review and reporting process would facilitate an understanding of how this is being achieved and the progress being made. Such a report would be something of an impact statement on the condition of indigenous people and the response of all spheres of government to meeting their needs.

Better planning, coordination and pooling of funds, inherent in the bilateral agreements promoted by the National Commitment, contribute to this efficiency and effectiveness.

These developments may offer broader planning and economic development requirements and opportunities and strengthen regional planning mechanisms.

4.3 Need for integrated strategies

Sustainable development can only be achieved by integrated strategies that incorporate key economic, social, environmental and political elements. All components should be brought together in a long-term strategic approach.

Partnerships are essential to achieving the development agenda. They are promoted by effective governance arrangements which provide the framework within which development is planned, coordinated and implemented. They build on the capacities of the individual partners. Their aim is to improve the impact of their actions on the well being of the people.

While the requirement for a Development Plan is part of the ATSIC Act and its preparation the responsibility of the TSRA, it should be a plan that incorporates the activities and projections of the various government departments operating in the Torres Strait.

Each year, the TSRA should be able to report on the impact of government programs and services by having each Department report in the first instance to the TSRA through the cluster arrangements.

A special capacity development program would aim to ensure that capacity building is integrated with program assistance.

A key requisite would be to undertake a capacity needs assessment. This could be done in conjunction with the community planning cycle at one level and at the broader institutional and organisational level, on the other.

4.4 Aligning Agency programs with community well-being

Of particular interest to the TSRA is to establish a better alignment in the presentation of the plan and subsequent reporting between the outcomes and outputs of Government agencies and the expectations of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people in the Torres Strait to improve their well-being.

Because the TSRA is only one of a number of organisations that have responsibilities in the Torres Strait region, it is important that these responsibilities be captured in the plan.

The TSRA is now inviting government agencies to provide a brief description of its budgetary and service delivery framework, including agreed outcomes, inputs and outputs. It would also assist if each agency could indicate the processes for consulting with Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people in the Torres Strait.

In doing so, we have in mind that agencies might give particular attention to the way these programs serve the interests of Indigenous people in improving their well-being. Among the matters that might be considered is the extent to which program and services meet broad community objectives, including:

- (a) promoting leadership, individual initiative and self-reliance
- (b) developing community, organisational and institutional capacity
- (c) enhancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander capabilities for self-management
- (d) ensuring shared responsibility through consultation and partnership arrangements with Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people.

4.5 Infrastructure and health agreements

Two significant initiatives in the provision of works and services for Indigenous people in the Torres Strait have been the signing of agreements between the TSRA, and the Commonwealth and State Governments in respect of infrastructure

development, including a major water supply upgrade scheme, and health. These initiatives demonstrate the value of the TSRA being able to enter into cooperative arrangements with Commonwealth and State Governments.

4.6 Major Infrastructure Program

A Major Infrastructure Program is designed to meet the basic health-related infrastructure needs of the communities. In October 1998, the Queensland Government signed an agreement with the TSRA committing \$15 million towards the program. These funds were pooled with those available from the Commonwealth Government, enabling a \$30 million program to be implemented over three years.

Through construction of much needed infrastructure and upgrading of existing facilities, the program has and will continue to vastly improve the health outcomes, and therefore well being, of our people.

This cooperative funding arrangement between the TSRA and State governments has been a demonstrated success and it is proposed to continue the Program in three year cycles over a period of 10 years to ensure infrastructure development is continued in each community.

The TSRA has also addressed the major water shortages experienced by the island communities for many years, through the Torres Strait Water Upgrade Project.

In February 1999 tenders were let for the \$21 million second stage of the project, jointly funded by the TSRA and the Queensland Government. The project was implemented on eight outer island communities.

In past years many island communities have run out of water supplies during the long dry seasons and councils have had to go to great expense to have water transported to their communities on barges. The facilities and systems constructed through this project have ensured that communities have adequate water supplies year around.

4.7 Torres Strait Health Framework Agreement

In February 1999 the TSRA and the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments signed an historic health agreement which committed the three parties to combining their efforts to improve the health status of Torres Strait Islanders living in the Torres Strait region. Through this approach the TSRA will address the health issues specific to the Torres Strait.

This will be accomplished through increasing the region's health resources, improving its health services and developing an environmental and health care policy.

5. Conclusion

The emphasis in this submission is on integrated and comprehensive planning to improve the delivery of services by agencies and community organisations.

A critical element in the process has been the governance arrangements which have flowed from the creation of the Torres Strait Regional Authority. Through the TSRA as an independent statutory authority, performing in the Torres Strait functions similar to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, communities, through their councils and direct representation on the authority have been empowered to improve their situation.

Significant to the Torres Strait experience has been the cooperative relationships between the Commonwealth and State governments, on the one hand, and between the TSRA and local government, on the other. Integration of community government within the regional structure has been beneficial.

The TSRA's statutory authority in relation to the planning and coordination of all inputs has been instrumental in building the capacity of communities to manage their own affairs within an agreed framework.

The Authority has been a significant development in the transition of the Torres Strait to a more comprehensive form of regional governance. At the core of these arrangements has been the enhancement of the quality of life through better management and delivery of community services.

If there is a model for other Indigenous communities it is that effective and legitimate governance arrangements are a fundamental aspect in giving Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people the power and capacity to engage beneficially with government in the interests of all stakeholders.