



Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure, Transport,  
Regional Development and Local Government

Dr Kathleen Dermody  
Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Dr Dermody

**Subject: Response to Questions on Notice from the Senate Foreign Affairs,  
Trade and Defence References Committee - Matters relating to the  
Torres Strait**

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee on 17 December 2009.  
Please find attached the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional  
Development and Local Government's responses to questions I took on notice during  
the hearing.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Wilson  
Deputy Secretary

3 February 2010

**Senate Foreign Affairs, Trade and Defence References Committee**  
**Reference: Matters relating to the Torres Strait**  
**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**  
**Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government**

**Question No 1.**

**Hansard Page/s:** 85

**Senator Trood (*Chair*) asked:**

It was suggested the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government was the agency that was most likely to collect statistics on the movement of vessels through the strait and, further, Mr Wilson, you were put in the frame as the agency that probably also has statistics on the use of pilotage through the strait. I wondered whether or not (a) that is true and (b) if you could provide us with those statistics, please.

**Answer:**

During the 2008/2009 financial year, 1332 ships made 3281 voyages through the Prince of Wales channel, the main passage of the Torres Strait. Of those voyages, 3134 were piloted and 147 were non piloted. Vessels transiting the Torres Strait area without a pilot are typically coastal traders, warships and those vessels participating on a voluntary basis in the Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait Vessel Traffic Service (REEFVTS), that is vessels not subject to pilotage provisions under Marine Orders Part 54.

**Question No 2.**

**Hansard Page/s:** 85

**Senator Trood (*Chair*) asked:**

Perhaps you could just quickly explain to us: does your department have any officers stationed up in the Torres Strait on Thursday Island or anywhere nearby on a regular basis?

**Answer:**

The Regional Manager and a Senior Regional Services Officer from the Office of Northern Australia - Townsville Office visited the Torres Strait on 16 and 17 February 2009 to attend the Torres/Northern Peninsula Area Consultative Committee meeting.

A further visit by Townsville based Office of Northern Australia staff was scheduled for 27 August 2009 but was held in Cairns as the key personnel from the Torres Strait Regional Authority were to be in the Cairns region at that time.

The General Manager of the Office of Northern Australia and a Senior Executive Officer in the Local Government and Regional Development Division both met twice during 2009 with a General Manager of the Torres Strait Regional Authority. These meetings took place in Canberra.

**Question No 3.**

**Hansard Page/s:** 89

**Senator Ferguson asked:**

Is it possible for you to find out how often they [Torres Strait Island Regional Council] meet and let us know on notice?

**Answer:**

According to the Torres Strait Island Regional Council (TSIRC), the Council meetings take place on the third week of each month throughout the year with the venue of the meeting rotated through the TSIRC community. The TSIRC advises that the dates and locations of the TSIRC meetings have not been set for 2010.

**Question No 4.**

**Hansard Page/s:** 89

**Senator Forshaw asked:**

There are two local government bodies: the Torres Strait Island Regional Council and the Torres Shire Council. What is the difference between the two?

**Answer:**

In 2008, all 15 separate island local councils were amalgamated into the single Torres Strait Island Regional Council. Torres Shire Council was left unchanged. Both councils are headquartered at Thursday Island.

**Question No 5.**

**Hansard Page/s:** 89

**Senator Forshaw asked:**

That is the way I read it, but you are not aware of which council covers which area.

**Answer:**

The Torres Shire comprises all of Queensland lying between latitude 11 degrees south and the international border with Papua New Guinea. Torres Strait Island Regional Council is located within parts of the Torres Shire area.

Further information regarding the Torres Strait Island Regional Council and Torres Shire Council, including maps outlining the geographical areas of both councils is available from the following websites:

*Torres Strait Island Regional Council:*

*<http://www.tsirc.qld.gov.au/> (website under development)*

<http://www.oesr.qld.gov.au/queensland-by-theme/demography/maps/asgc-2008/qld-lga-2008/qld-lga-2008-torres-strait-island.pdf>

*Torres Shire Council:*

<http://www.torres.qld.gov.au/>

<http://www.oesr.qld.gov.au/queensland-by-theme/demography/maps/asgc-2008/qld-lga-2008/qld-lga-2008-torres.pdf>

**Question No 6.**

**Hansard Page/s:** 92

**Senator Trood (*Chair*) asked:**

Can you tell us whether or not you have responded to that report? Perhaps you could take that on notice.

**Answer:**

The Government welcomes the report 'Everybody's Business: Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Community Stores' and recognises the critical role that well functioning and high quality stores play in remote Indigenous communities, particularly with regard to ensuring the food security of people in these locations. The Government, through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, is carefully considering the 33 recommendations made in the report and will respond in due course.