

From: s47F
To: s47F
Cc: s47F
Subject: FW: Torres Strait - inundation issues [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED:NO CAVEATS]
Date: Thursday, 1 April 2010 2:10:34 PM
Attachments: [Issues paper IDC Torres Strait draft 25 March.docx](#)

Hi s47F

As promised, here is the draft of the issues paper as it stands. Still awaiting input from DFAT on behalf of the agencies with a border interest. This is expected on Tuesday. You might also want to look at MN10-000197. s22
cheers, s47F

From: s47F [mailto:s47F]
Sent: Thursday, 25 March 2010 12:57 PM
To: s47F
Cc: s47F
Subject: RE: Torres Strait - inundation issues [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED:NO CAVEATS]

s47F

Thanks for comments –suggested changes seem sensible to me.

Have made some small changes to proposed text relating to what does AG need to do. We need to be clear that current inundation is not a climate change issue. However, any response to current inundation will have longer term implications for TS communities in how they respond to the future issue of sea level rise (if you are building a protective structure do you plan now for a structure that can be raised in future years). A response to current inundation issues also provides the breathing space for communities to plan and develop adaptation strategies. Time to plan will be important as the Torres Strait is most likely going to be faced with relocating some communities over the longer term and i would expect a fair bit of consultation and planning will be needed to make those decisions successful.

Do you have anyone in your team that can chase up the three other AG players and provide quick summary for Attachment? s47F trying to finalise an AG response to House of Reps inquiry and won't be able to do further on the TS paper this week.

Re the comment about whose interest in HOR report – it is the TSRA who have a very keen interest in the response to the HOR report.

cheers

s47F

s47F
A/g Director
Coastal Adaptation
Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency

s47F

From: s47F [mailto:s47F]
Sent: Wednesday, 24 March 2010 5:19 PM
To: s47F
Cc: s47F
Subject: FW: Torres Strait - inundation issues [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED:NO CAVEATS]
Importance: High

Hi s47F

Thanks for this. I have made some suggested amendments in track changes on the issues paper. In particular I have added some agencies whose operations are potentially affected and which should be included in the paper. In terms of contacts in those agencies, I would start with s47F from DFAT who coordinates the Torres Strait Treaty IDC (s47F). As well as information on DFAT's interest s47F should be able to provide the relevant contact officers in DIAC, AQIS and AFMA.

I have also tried to clarify what it is we need to ascertain ie what the adverse impact on Australian Government operations may be (without this, it would remain a Qld concern only) and what contribution the Australian Government can/is prepared to make.

Finally I have removed references to budgetary processes as this would require the document to be classified and make it complicated to circulate. The budgetary issues can be discussed at the meeting instead.

Give me a call if you wish to discuss.

cheers, s47F
s47F

From: s47F [mailto:s47F]
Sent: Wednesday, 24 March 2010 1:37 PM
To: s47F
Cc: s47F
Subject: Torres Strait - inundation issues [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED:NO CAVEATS]
Importance: High

Hi s47F

Further to our telephone conversation, grateful if you would organise an IDC of interested AG portfolios to discuss and agree on a way forward to address the inundation issues confronting Torres Strait Island communities. Assume that FaHCSIA would chair the IDC. Attached is a list of branch head level and above contacts, which s47F gathered in talking to departments about their involvement in TS – not sure if this is comprehensive but useful start.

Attached is a draft of a proposed joint (FaHCSIA – DCCEE) issues paper to circulate prior to meeting. s47F has spoken to contacts within departments about the interests/funding programs relevant to TS, but otherwise text has not been cleared with individual departments - portfolio reps may wish to comment on the draft list of portfolio interests and program involvement?

While DCCEE in no way sees itself as taking an AG lead on the issue of Torres Strait inundation, Minister Wong has indicated her intention to visit in the first week of May and I understand her office has spoken with your Minister's office about sorting through the broad AG response. In that context, and as discussed, useful to start discussions amongst departments earlier than late, before there would then presumably be some engagement with the Qld Government.

Happy to discuss.

cheers

s47F

s47F

A/g Director
Coastal Adaptation
Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency

s47F

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Inundation – Torres Strait Islands

Joint Issues Paper by FaHCSIA and DCCEE

The inundation threat

The Torres Strait Islands represent the northern most part of Australian territory, with a number of the Torres Strait islands only 3 km from Papua New Guinea. There are over 100 islands in the Torres Strait group, many of which are low lying and 17 are inhabited. The Torres Strait population is around 8,700 of which approximately 80% is indigenous.

A number of Torres Strait Islander communities are currently experiencing significant inundation during king tide events (see images below). Inundation impacts are exacerbated during storm events that occur coincident with a high tide. Additionally, progressive erosion is occurring along parts of the coastline, which is also impacting infrastructure.



Specific works will be required in some areas to protect current infrastructure from the effects of king tides. Any investment in works should also accommodate future risk from rising sea levels associated with climate change. To date, key policies and their implementation, particularly to do with planning, housing and infrastructure, have not fully taken into account risks from climate change.

The socio-economic characteristics of the Torres Strait population and general low elevation of many of the islands make communities highly vulnerable to climate change impacts. In particular, rising sea levels due to climate change will escalate current risks of inundation and erosion into the future.

Issues

State of Funding for Inundation Protection

The ~~Department of~~ Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) portfolio provides base funding for the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA). FaHCSIA and the Qld Government also jointly fund on a 50/50 basis an infrastructure program for the Torres Strait (the Major Infrastructure Program or MIP). However, the funds available under this program are not adequate for addressing king tide inundation and future climate change risk.

The TSRA s22

s22 estimates current inundation problems and longer term climate change adaptation will cost up to \$18.5m for immediate priority works on 6 of the most affected islands (the largest amount of funding sought is \$7m for the low lying mud island of Saibai). Proposed works are mostly seawall construction and the upgrading and raising of infrastructure.

s22 The TSRA also estimates that \$2.5m is needed for a climate change adaptation program, which includes research and data acquisition, projections of future impacts under a changing climate, identification and assessment of adaptation options, and community adaptation planning.

The list of proposed works and adaptation planning are well grounded and based on the outcomes from an assessment into protection options undertaken by Dr Kevin Parnell, Marine and Tropical Science Research Facility, James Cook University. ~~Although a~~ Additional initiatives and investment over the long term may be required to effectively adapt to rising sea levels and other climate change impacts. Longer term adaptation will likely require the relocation of facilities and people; initiatives which will be more cost effective if planning and community engagement is commenced early.

Further Recent Climate Change Interest

The TSRA has been active in raising the public profile of inundation issues in the Torres Strait, most recently on the SBS *Insight* program. Representatives of the TSRA have also raised the issue in talks held in the last month with the Minister for Climate Change, Energy Efficiency and Water, Penny Wong, and the Queensland Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability, Kate Jones.

Minister Wong has indicated to the TSRA a willingness to visit the Torres Strait Islands.

The TSRA has also made representations to the Prime Minister and has noted a strong interest in the Australian Government response to the report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee of Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts, *Managing our Coastal Zone in a Changing Climate*. The committee's report includes two recommendations of direct relevance to the Torres Strait (refer Attachment B).

Partnership Options

The Queensland Government has jurisdictional responsibility for the Torres Strait Islands. Informal advice from Queensland Government officials indicates that they recognise the need to address the issue and would expect engagement with the Commonwealth.

s22

Comment [y2]: Interest on whose part? TSRA have keen interest

A number of Australian Government departments have an interest in the Torres Strait Islands or funding programs of relevance, including:

- Department of Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Indigenous issues)
- Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency (climate change adaptation)
- Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (border protection)
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Torres Strait Treaty)
- Department of Immigration and Customs
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (AQIS and AFMA)
- Attorney-General's Department (disaster management)
- Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government (infrastructure and Office of Northern Australia)
- Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (environment programs, administration of the EPBC Act)

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These interests are outlined in more detail at Attachment C.

A partnership arrangement between the Australian and Queensland governments is one feasible option. While Queensland has jurisdictional responsibility, the strategic importance of the Torres Strait and the significant existing and future investment by the Australian Government in the region indicates a need for the Australian Government to be involved in strategic planning and aspects of service delivery. in relation to climate change mitigation and adaptation. However, the level of Australian Government involvement and type of involvement by Australian Government departments needs to be clarified. In particular, we need to identify and where possible quantify the potential adverse effects of inundation on areas of Australian Government interest, and to identify- an appropriate Australian Government response potential funding sources for mitigation/adaptation work. It is acknowledged that not all agencies whose operations are potentially adversely affected will have applicable funding-

Attachment B

House of Representatives Standing Committee of Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts, *Managing our Coastal Zone in a Changing Climate: The time to act is now.*

The House of Representatives report *Managing our coastal zone in a changing climate* was released in October 2009. It includes two specific recommendations on the Torres Strait. DCCEE is coordinating the Australian Government response to committee recommendations.

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that the Department of Climate Change, in collaboration with the Queensland Government, CSIRO and Indigenous communities in the Torres Strait, undertake a major study into the vulnerability of the Torres Strait to the impacts of climate change and provide assistance in the development of an adaptation plan

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government give the five recommendations calling for information, studies and data, as proposed by the Torres Strait Regional Authority, early and urgent consideration with a view to their implementation.

Attachment C

Australian Government portfolio interest and program involvement: Torres Strait inundation and climate change*Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs*

The FaHCSIA portfolio funds the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA), a Commonwealth statutory authority under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Act 2005 (ATSI Act)*⁵. The TSRA has responsibility for formulating, coordinating and implementing programs for Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people living within the region. It is the peak Commonwealth representative body for Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people living in the Torres Strait.

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Through the TSRA, FaHCSIA co-funds the Major Infrastructure Program (MIP) for the Torres Strait on a 50/50 basis with the Qld Government. The current MIP has two years of funding remaining and all funds have been prioritised. The current MIP will terminate in 2012 2011-2012 and, at present, there is no commitment to any further funding.

FaHCSIA has noted the Department's current policy approach is a move to transfer responsibility for infrastructure and municipal services to state governments, although aspects of this policy approach, particularly around funding arrangements, have not been fully settled.

FaHCSIA also coordinates the annual Single Indigenous Budget (SIB) process.^{s22}

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Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency

Adapting to the unavoidable impacts of climate change is one of the Australian Government's three pillars of climate change policy. The Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency (DCCEE) recently released the Australian Government Position Paper: *Adapting to Climate Change in Australia*. The paper identifies the Australian Government's role in relation to climate change adaptation as:

- maintaining a strong, flexible economy and a social safety net
- leading national reform
- managing Commonwealth assets and programs
- national science and information.

The position paper identifies coastal management as a national priority.

The Department does not fund protective works. However, there is scope for DCCEE to contribute to appropriate research and studies and become involved in the provision of information for adaptation planning, particularly in relation to vulnerable communities such as the Torres Strait.

Under the International Climate Change Adaptation Initiative \$150 million is being allocated over three years to assist vulnerable countries in our region, with a primary focus on the Pacific and East Timor, to adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change. The TSRA has noted that while Australia is funding climate change work in neighbouring Pacific countries the same issues impacting Australia's own Indigenous island communities are currently not well addressed.

Prime Minister and Cabinet

The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) has an interest in border security and emergency management matters. The Torres Strait Islands play a significant role in helping enforce Australia's quarantine and border surveillance requirements. There is benefit to Australia in having the Torres Strait island inhabited, and this requires the provision and maintenance of sustainable infrastructure.

Attorney-General's Department

State and Territory governments have primary responsibility for the planning and delivery of response to disasters and emergencies within their jurisdictions. However, the Australian Government provides funding through the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA) to States and Territories to help pay for natural disaster relief and recovery costs.

From 2009-2010, Commonwealth funding for disaster mitigation works and support for emergency management volunteers will be approximately \$110 million over four years. The new *Natural Disaster Resilience Program* (NDRP) consolidates the existing *Bushfire Mitigation Program*, *Natural Disaster Mitigation Program* and, from 2010-2011, the *National Emergency Volunteer Support Fund*. A key aim of the NDRP is to enhance the ability of communities to better withstand the effects of disasters, particularly those arising from the impact of climate change. However, projects funded for disaster mitigation works are not normally in the range of the total quantum of funds sought by the TSRA.

If the increased risk of ocean inundation of infrastructure and housing in the Torres Strait is not adequately addressed, it can be expected that the Commonwealth's financial liability for damage under the NDRRA may increase. Appropriate planning and adaptation measures for future risk are therefore in the Commonwealth's interests.

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

There are a range of community infrastructure programs and local road programs, (tied and untied grants) which are available to local governments. However, funding available under these programs is not normally in the range of the quantum of total funds sought by the TSRA.

Regional Development Australia (RDA) is a partnership between the Australian, state and territory and local governments to support the growth and development of Australia's regions. 55 RDA committees, including one which covers the Torres Strait, have been established to provide strategic and targeted responses to regional economic, environmental and social issues. RDA committees are involved in, for example, development of regional plans and infrastructure audits. The Department provides funding to support the establishment and operation of the committees. In some jurisdictions, state/territory and local governments are also providing funding and/or other forms of support to the committees.

The Department also administers funding allocated from the Building Australia Fund (BAF) to fund critical infrastructure in the transport, communications, water and energy sectors of the economy.

The Office of Northern Australia (ONA) provides high level strategic policy advice to the Government on sustainable development issues in, or affecting, northern Australia. The Office seeks to enable better coordination across the Government and between governments, businesses and communities on issues affecting northern Australia. The ONA has a particular

focus on issues confronting the indigenous population in northern Australia. The ONA does not have separate ongoing program funding.

Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts

The Department's *Caring for Our Country* program provides funding for a number of projects in the Torres Strait including projects to secure drinking water supplies on islands which may be threatened by climate change and in particular to secure bore water for Ugar Island. Other *Caring for Our Country* funded projects in the Torres Strait include increasing Indigenous Protected Areas; increasing coastal community engagement; and increasing Indigenous community skills and knowledge.

If a climate change adaptation plan is developed for the Torres Strait, future *Caring for our Country* activities funded in this region would be considered in respect of the adaptation plan. In this regard, a draft Torres Strait Climate Change Strategy has been prepared by the TSRA.

The Department also administers the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) which provides for the protection of matters of national environmental significance. This may be relevant to the issue of coastal inundation in the Torres Strait if proposed protective works have major environmental impacts. The Hawke Report recently reviewed the EPBC Act and the Government is currently considering its response to the Report.