

# DEPUTATIONS 2021-22



Torres Strait Island  
REGIONAL COUNCIL



## Acknowledgement

The Torres Strait Island Regional Council acknowledges our Native Title Holders, our Elders past and present, and all members of the Communities we serve within the 5 clusters of Zenadth Kes; the Gudaw Maluligal Nation of the Top Western Islands, the Maluligal Nation of the Western Islands, the Kemer Kemer Meriam Nation of the Eastern Islands, the Kulkalgal Nation of the Central Islands, and the Kaiwalagal Kaurareg Aboriginal Nation of the Inner Islands. We recognise their continuing connection to land and sea, and the strength of a cultural heritage and belief system that spans past, present and future generations.

## Disclaimer

Disclaimer: Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal peoples should be aware that this publication may contain images or names of people who have since passed away. Council respects the right of families and communities to request the removal from subsequent publications of any image or name that causes distress.



## Message from the Mayor

I acknowledge our Traditional Owners, our Elders past and present and all of our community members across the length and breadth of Zenadth Kes, from where the sun rises on Mer in our East, to where the sun sets on Boigu in our West.

I also recognise all First Nations people throughout Australia, acknowledging our shared connection to the land, sea and cultural practice that has existed as long as we have.

Torres Strait Island Regional Council (TSIRC) is unique.

Our geography, remoteness and the unique characteristics of our five nation clusters inform a Council with responsibilities that transcend the traditional Council core business of “roads, rates and rubbish”.

TSIRC is deeply engaged in the provision of aged care, child care and community services; continues to direct significant resources to strategically developing local enterprise and is invested in the continued pursuit of regional governance.

We are fundamental to the social, economic and environmental sustainability of our region and we serve our communities with an independent future always front of mind.

Our first ever Councillors meeting in 1937 established a blueprint for an open and engaging communication at all levels of government – and articulating our priority areas by Deputation each year is a continuation of that respectful and informed dialogue.

Deputations Priority Areas 2021 – 22 articulates Council’s top 10 priority areas which are deemed by Council to be critical to achieving our mission: to improve the liveability of our communities in all we do – and to continue to build a foundation for sustainable prosperity in our region.

I look forward to the opportunity to discuss these priorities in more detail.

Koeyma Eso, Au Esoau

**Cr Phillemon Mosby**  
Mayor  
Torres Strait Island Regional Council





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# FUNDING

Marine infrastructure and equitable access  
Local waste management strategy  
Regional social housing and asbestos removal  
Coastal protection and climate resilience  
Reinstate local government funding



## Priority Area One Marine infrastructure and equitable access

Council's marine infrastructure is aged and requires significant repairs and maintenance. Age and wear and tear have rendered the majority of marine infrastructure facilities no longer suitable for most communities, and especially for people with a disability or those on certain island communities. Without reliable marine infrastructure, travel and access is compromised between the 15 Divisions that comprise Torres Strait Island Regional Council. This is having a negative impact to health, education, traditional hunting, basic groceries and services and can present discrimination liabilities. The condition of the critical marine infrastructure varies from being in 'fair' condition to 'extremely deteriorated'.

### What we are seeking:

Additional investment of \$128m to complete Council's marine infrastructure and equitable access program of works, including the replacement of existing finger jetties with DDA compliant structures.

Works include upgrades or replacement of existing wharves. This funding request is scheduled to coincide with a considered roll-out of projects:

- Year 1 - \$8m
- Years 2-5 - \$30m each year.

### At a glance:

Estimated replacement costs for a basic wharf in the Torres Strait is approximately \$11.6m (DDA compliant gangway and pontoon). The \$128m estimate quoted above is for wharf works only.

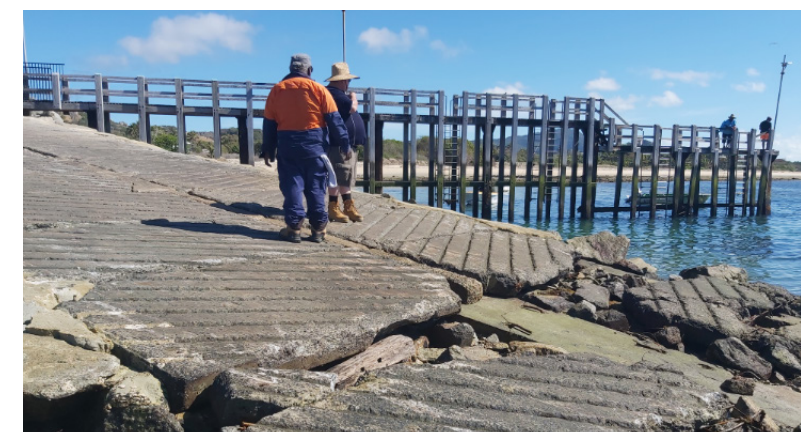
Poruma, Saibai, Masig, Boigu and Erub each require dredging on the marine access channel for barges and pocket dredging to facilitate barge and essential freight provision at approximately \$26m for all five communities.

Barge ramps at Arkai, St Pauls, Badu, Dauan and Boigu require urgent attention at approximately \$2m per community.

Mabuiag and Mer communities have no jetty structures at all. Marine infrastructure underpins the movement of people and freight between communities and enables access to essential supplies (food, water, medical) and services (emergency services, medical & construction) and basic services such as health, education and shopping.

### More information:

Visit: <http://tsirc.qld.gov.au/deputations-2022>



### Readiness:

Subject to available funding, a new project in this suite can be ready for commencement at the beginning of each financial year.





## Priority Area Two Local waste management strategy

Provision of waste management services in the Torres Strait Island Regional Council footprint is uniquely challenging, noting that the Council serves 15 distinct communities, across 14 islands. Effective waste management is further complicated by Council operating across two biosecurity zones. Council aims to become less reliant on landfilling and to pilot an on-site waste management program that would invest in recycling, composting and responsible waste management.

### What we are seeking:

- Funding to establish and prove a prototype waste management system on Warraber: approximately \$3.2m
- Approximately \$44m to roll out the proved prototype to the other 14 communities
- Investment for Council's proposed Waste Management Plan, over FY 2022-27.



### At a glance:

Funding would enable establishment of a waste sorting and transfer station at Warraber, including a bio-treatment system for organic waste as a test program for wider application.

Council has actively researched contemporary waste management practices and the implementation of the new system will be an outcome of the Indigenous Waste Management Strategy.

Establishment of transfer stations, bio-bins and processes across all communities will enable sorting of recyclables, composting organics and preparing general non-putrescible/non-recyclable wastes for further processing.

Warraber would be a test waste site, with plans to roll out to the other communities once it is optimised.

Significant savings to the Council would be realised in three years and the impact of timely, appropriate waste management would contribute to safer, cleaner communities.

### Readiness:

Establishment of the Warraber site can commence immediately upon advice of funding availability. There is an opportunity to underake aspects of the waste management process to other communities while the entire Warraber process is optimised. This could include provision of sorting and transfer stations.

The Torres Strait Island Indigenous Waste Strategy aligns with a recently commissioned study between Council, DES and LGAQ.

### More information:

Visit: <http://tsirc.qld.gov.au/deputations-2022>



## Priority Area Three Regional social housing and asbestos removal

Access to safe and secure housing is a social determinant of health and is a critical foundation for Closing the Gap and building resilient, strong communities. Council has a portfolio of 900 social houses, making it the largest housing provider in the North Queensland region, however insufficient funding leads to a constant waiting list for housing. Many residents awaiting housing are faced with overcrowding, homelessness, and health and safety challenges. Some existing Council houses require removal of asbestos in order to be habitable.

### What we are seeking:

- Support, partnership and investment at State and Federal levels for innovative solutions to address Council's housing crisis
- \$19.3m to enable rectification works to existing homes affected by asbestos (including scoping of asbestos removal program).

### At a glance:

Council's Register of Needs currently has over 300 applications for social housing.

55 Council homes are affected by asbestos and cannot be inhabited until asbestos is removed properly. Eight properties deemed "high risk" are being reviewed by the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy.

Private home ownership is particularly challenging in our communities, due largely to low incomes. The RACGP has outlined the risks of overcrowding in its publication *The National Guide to Preventive Health Assessment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*.

The absence of suitable and available housing is an obstacle to Council establishing employment opportunities within communities and building community capacity and capability.

The impact of asbestos contamination extends to the well being of our people and the cost of removing asbestos is compounded by the need to freight and properly dispose of asbestos once it is removed.

### More information:

Visit: <http://tsirc.qld.gov.au/deputations-2022>

Reliance on community housing remains relatively constant, however the cost of building (or renovating) continues to rise with the passage of time.

Building in the Torres Strait region is particularly expensive. A 4 bedroom, 2 bathroom new build typically costs approximately \$800 000.

### Readiness:

Council has identified potential sites for new homes and subject to engagement with Traditional Owners, is able to fast-track building approvals to enable rapid commencement of new builds.

A tender would be let for new builds and for an asbestos removal program, noting that some asbestos removal is occurring under the repairs and maintenance program run by Council.







## Priority Area Four Coastal defence and climate resilience

Tidal inundation and erosion are serious threats in the Torres Strait Islands. Critical infrastructure and places of significance such as burial sites are regularly impacted by climatic change and the prospect of losing such sites is a reality. Coastal protection and climate resilience will inform our ability to protect our land, preserve our important sites and continue living where we do.

### What we are seeking:

- Estimate \$20m to undertake design and construction of additional coastal defence works in communities such as Mer, Mabuiag and Erub
- Estimate \$15m to undertake design and construction of critical road and drainage improvement works
- \$500 000 to employ three Resilience Champions Positions, over an initial three year period.



### At a glance:

Funding is important for future coastal defense works which is in addition to the six major projects of the Coastal Defence works currently being undertaken.

A commitment to enable the engagement of “Resilience Champions” to run community-based adaptation and resilience programs will support a wider strategy to ensure communities are aware of how they can contribute to climate resilience.

These roles were highlighted as a recommendation in the *Torres Strait Regional Adaptation and Resilience Plan 2016-2021*.

Road pavement and drainage works to make transport safe and reliable, with specific consideration of weather and climate change-related impacts will inform longer-term sustainability of existing infrastructure.

A number of communities in the Torres Strait Island Regional Council footprint are at immediate risk of inundation. The sea level rise experienced in the Torres Strait is three times higher than mainland Australia.

### Readiness:

The capital projects require detailed design and subsequent construction pending funding.



### More information:

Visit: <http://tsirc.qld.gov.au/deputations-2022>



## Priority Area Five Reinstatement local government funding

Council continues to struggle to provide adequate and appropriate infrastructure and services in the current funding environment. The reduced core Federal funding places additional pressure on Council, in an already complex financial landscape. Council faces the impact of additional costs by virtue of comprising 15 Divisions, across 14 unique island locations. Without reinstatement of previous levels of Federal funding, Council risks adversely impacting the standards of living for its residents.

### What we are seeking:

- Restore the Financial Assistance Grant to at least 1% of Commonwealth tax revenue
- Address concerns regarding poor fit between allocation methodology and Council’s unique circumstances
- Additional funds would be used:
  - Significantly to meet increasing demands on local infrastructure and services
  - To offset the current operating deficiency (prior to depreciation) to ensure Council is sustainable for the long term
  - To rectify aging and deteriorating infrastructure
  - To continue to provide services not generally considered core Council business such as fuel, aged care and child care.

### At a glance:

Financial Assistance Grants are currently set at approximately 0.6% of the Commonwealth’s estimated taxation revenue, although historically it was at 1%.

Current Financial Assistance Grant funding under the approximately 0.6% rate is \$12,332,746 for 2021-22.

A return to the original 1% rate would result in an increase in funding to a total value of approximately \$20,554,577, which would inform better financial sustainability for Council and enhanced ability to address continuing issues associated with service delivery and infrastructure.

### More information:

Visit: <http://tsirc.qld.gov.au/deputations-2022>



### Readiness:

Council has a number of significant projects which the additional funding would be immediately directed to, with a particular focus on infrastructure and community services.



# ADVOCACY

Regional governance

Digital connectivity

Local prosperity & enterprise development

International border protection

Healthcare and wellbeing services



## Priority Area Six Regional governance

The Torres Strait region operates under excessive and often duplicated levels of governance. Council aspires to govern its own affairs, however as outlined in the Torres Strait Regional Authority's Regional Assembly Transition Plan (2018), there is still significant reform required. A key pillar of this transition is the acknowledgement of the traditional regional name: Zenadth Kes. Establishing a Regional Assembly model of government would enable a greater level of autonomy to discharge Local, State and Commonwealth powers in one governing entity, formally recognising the principles of Ailan Kustom, and traditional governance systems.

Our unique Ailan Kustom, which is now recognised by the Australia Judicial and Legislative System as our inalienable right has been in place throughout our history. It is time for the transition aspirations of the people of the Torres Strait to be realised.

### What we are seeking:

- Formal endorsement of the name change for local government and place name to Zenadth Kes Regional Council and Zenadth Kes.
- Formal recognition of the rights of the people of the Torres Strait to elect and be governed by a Regional Assembly.
- Funding to enable the smooth transition from the current Australian governing practice to the Zenadth Kes Regional Assembly.

### At a glance:

The *Regional Assembly Transition Plan*, as authorised by the Torres Strait Regional Authority in June 2018, provides a detailed regional history, articulation of a preferred model, and a roadmap for the successful delivery of the Regional Assembly body.

The Plan was endorsed by regional leaders and was formally endorsed by Council during a Special Meeting on 28 July 2020.

Council formally endorsed both the local government name change (to Zenadth Kes Regional Council), and the place name change (to Zenadth Kes) at its Ordinary Meeting on 21 July 2020.

### More information:

Visit: <http://tsirc.qld.gov.au/deputations-2022>



The introduction of the *Meriba Omasker Kaziw Kazipa (Torres Strait Islander Child Rearing Practice) Act 2020*, formally identified the nexus between LORE and LAW.

The Act signifies a true acknowledgement of traditional governance and language, and a continual progression from the Mabo Decision to the aspirations set forth in the Regional Assembly Transition Plan.





## Priority Area Seven Digital connectivity

The geographic location of Torres Strait Island communities, within a complex reef system, poses a significant challenge for conventional telecommunications, requiring digital bridges between islands. Inadequate or band-aid style investment approaches to connectivity will continue to divide community members in economic participation, social inclusion and access to essential services like allied health and tertiary studies. The lack of reliable digital connectivity hinders economic development, but also impairs access to health services and impedes basic functions such as the conduct of a Council meeting.

### What we are seeking:

- Support for expedient upgrade of basic telephony and data access to all outer island communities, creating parity with mainland services.
- Bi-partisan State and Federal support for investment models such as or similar to the Smart Cities and Suburbs Program, with a strategic focus on regional, remote and inter-island infrastructure development.
- Establish a Digital Local Government and Rural/ Regional Telecommunications Program to increase the community benefits of improved technology, connectedness and innovation.

### At a glance:

The Torres Strait has commenced its digital transformation journey with the Telstra Digital Expansion program, providing access to mobile and fixed line broadband services to some residents for the very first time. The program comprises 12 separate projects on 10 islands, providing the foundation for future telecommunication improvements. The original program scope is not expected to reach its full potential and has been most recently delayed by the advent of COVID-19.

It is common for several (and at times all 15) Council sites to experience communication blackouts, sometimes lasting several days, requiring workarounds for essential services like power card provision and grocery purchases. Business continuity and disaster management activities within the outer islands are currently restricted to satellite telephony which is costly to operate and often not effective.

### Readiness:

Council is well prepared to accommodate changes to digital connectivity in order to enhance service provision.

As the sole service provider in the region, Telstra is working closely with Council as the Managed Service Provider, however remains open to opportunities to engage with other service providers for enhanced connectivity outcomes.

### More information:

Visit: <http://tsirc.qld.gov.au/deputations-2022>



## Priority Area Eight Local prosperity & enterprise development

The Torres Strait hosts a number of unique industries, including but not limited to commercial fishing, arts and culture. Those industries require investment, resourcing and assistance with development to overcome commercial and social barriers to success. Enabling the establishment and/or growth of industry in the region will be a step towards redressing the social and economic disadvantage of Indigenous Australians.

### What we are seeking:

- Support from all levels of government to stimulate and encourage private sector investment into the Torres Strait region by incentivising sector development in:
  - Renewable energy and emission reduction solutions.
  - Digital development and smart tech pilot programs.
  - Key tourism industry (including arts, culture and education) development.
  - Incentives may include subsidised freight for produce out of the Torres Strait or tax concessions
- Support deregulation initiatives to foster the introduction of aquaculture and farming opportunities to make it more achievable for Torres Strait Islanders to set up new ventures
- Commitment to consult and work with Council on proactive economic, social and environmental solutions to meet local aspirations.

### At a glance:

Council provides 81.2% of all employment based within local island communities. Retaining existing and developing new skills through Council's apprenticeship program provides continuing employment opportunities.

82.3% of Council's workforce is Torres Strait Islander or Aboriginal

Torres Strait hosts three Arts Centres: Erub Arts; Badu Art Centre; Moa Arts.

### More information:

Visit: <http://tsirc.qld.gov.au/deputations-2022>



Access to international opportunities for Indigenous businesses is enhanced through inclusive, coordinated and outcomes-focused initiatives (Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade "Promoting the economic interests of Indigenous Australian Businesses Overseas").

### Readiness:

Council is prepared to work in collaboration or consultation with relevant agencies and entities to and an immediate start is achievable, subject to clarification of partnership models.





## Priority Area Nine International border protection

The Torres Strait is one of Australia's most critical regions for border protection, due to its geographic location, international border proximity and providing a home to complex and fragile marine reef ecology. The advent of COVID-19 has reinforced the importance of dedicated border protection and the balance of risks such as biosecurity, illegal immigration and illegal fishing remain of concern to Council.

### What we are seeking:

- Support for additional infrastructure in the Top Western islands to ensure increased border movement during crises does not present additional cost to Council
- Support for continued investment in operational hubs to enhance reach, vessel service provisioning and response times
- Support for continued investment in marine infrastructure to allow for more appropriate vessel classes to service the region, in turn increasing employment and industry development opportunities
- A permanent security presence in the Torres Strait region to assure the protection of international borders and adjacent zones.

### At a glance:

The two Fast Response vessels, specifically appointed to this region and located at Horn Island, rely on a third party to launch, constraining vessel use to standard business hours, which is contrary to the intent of border security. Vessel re-fuelling is restricted to Thursday Island, which limits the reach of vessels attending to international borders.

Bay Class vessels and helicopter services are typically provisioned as alternatives to the Fast Response vessels, however they lack the operational reach to cover our 42,000km<sup>2</sup> ocean footprint. The Bay Class vessels have a poor track record of success in this region.

Vacancies of key Border Force positions in several island communities have been attributed to the reduction of employee entitlements such as rent assistance and remote area allowances.

The state of several of the Border Force office facilities within the Torres Strait Regional Local Government Area requires attention.

Appropriate marine infrastructure will enable appropriate vessels to be located in the region to monitor border security.

### Readiness:

TSIRC is well positioned to commence work on projects, or scoping of same immediately upon receipt of advice of funding.

### More information:

Visit: <http://tsirc.qld.gov.au/deputations-2022>



## Priority Area Ten Healthcare and wellbeing services

One of the core social determinants of health is access to appropriate health care. Residents of Torres Strait Island communities encounter consistent barriers to accessing health services and often don't have access to preventative information and programs, further impacting on health and wellbeing inequalities, and poorer quality of life outcomes. Having to travel outside community for specialist or other health care impacts individuals and communities adversely and can lead to a resistance to seeking health care in the first instance.

### What we are seeking:

- Support the delivery of a Regional Health Symposium to evolve policies and programs aimed at meeting the existing and future preventative health needs of outer island communities, including:
  - Increased service reach, through upgrading associated facilities/infrastructure, connectivity and smart tech, to enable better access to health care for individuals and communities.
  - Development of new and sustainable funding arrangements in Torres Strait communities to ensure that services, including preventative programs, are meeting the needs of communities and to prevent any downstream impost of responsibilities and costs to Council.
  - Advocacy and support for an outer island health model; solutions for elderly and disabled resident respite care and safe housing for victims of domestic violence or abuse.

Municipal service delivery is focused on family health and well-being, however without adequate funding, those services will continue to be reduced or de-commissioned.

The health of our communities will continue to tell a story about funding and prioritization. As funding improves, so will health outcomes improve.



### At a glance:

Most, if not all of the other priorities in this document relate in some way to better health outcomes for the people of the Torres Strait Island Region.

Health is both a right and a necessity and remains a critical indicator for Council and for the Commonwealth government's assessment of the well being of communities.

### More information:

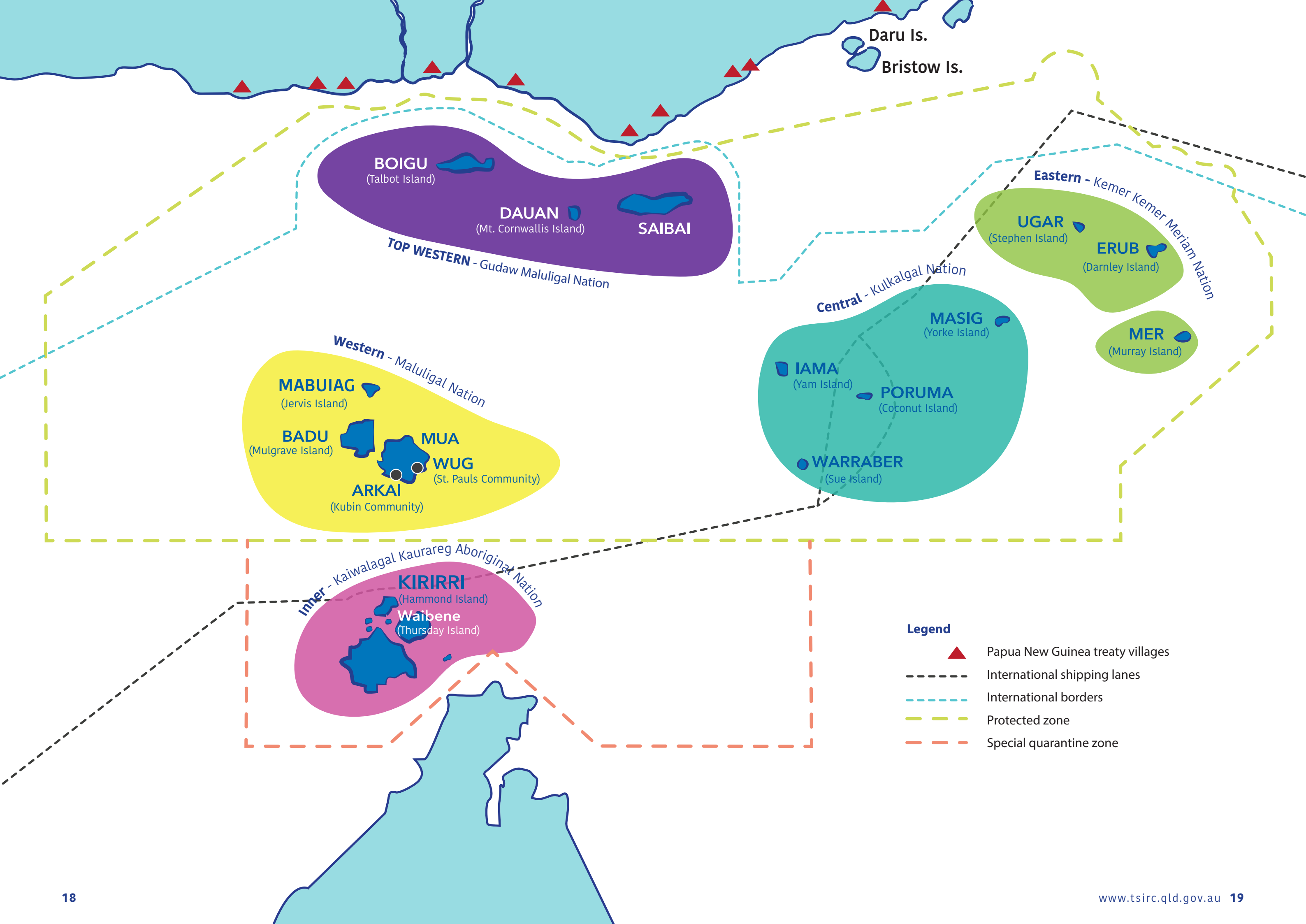
Visit: <http://tsirc.qld.gov.au/deputations-2022>

### Readiness:

An immediate start is achievable, subject to clarification of partnership models.











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