

**United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
New York 2019**

**Intervention delivered by Torres Strait Regional Authority Chairperson
Mr Napau Pedro Stephen AM**

Strong Regional Governance underpins our collective rights to lands, territories and resources

(Relating to Article 3 of the UN DRIP - Indigenous peoples have the right to self determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development).

Thank you Chair, firstly I would like to acknowledge the first nations people and traditional owners of this land that we are gathered on today.

I come from a group of islands between the tip of Australia and Papua New Guinea called the Torres Strait Islands.

Our islands are unique, because while they are part of Australia they have operated under quite separately defined and strongly principled governance arrangements prior to becoming part of Queensland in 1879.

Effective community and regional governance have been the building blocks for our region and a very important part of our identity throughout our journey in modern times.

While we only received the right to vote in Australia following the 1967 referendum, the Torres Strait has never let the challenges of national policy and systems stop its push to manage its own affairs - because nobody knows our homeland better than us.

There have been many attempts by the Queensland and the Australian Governments to give effect to our aspiration, through creating specific legislation for our area, forming and rationalising local governments and creating the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) in 1994 just to name a few.

Each of these has been subject to national and state policies.

The volume of reforms over the past 20 years have led to significant changes due to externally imposed legislative amendments and brought us to a point where many communities feel they have lost their ability to make decisions for themselves in key service delivery areas.

Regional governance is not about structures or levels of government, it is about the principle of Torres Strait Islanders having free, prior and informed consent and oversight of all things that happen in our homeland. It underpins everything related to our lands, territories and resources - our health, education, economic development right through to our climate change adaptation efforts.

The TSRA is working proactively with its key partners in the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area of Australia to build on the existing governance arrangements so that by 2020 we will have the foundations to move to the next level of our region and our people's journey.

That is to have a delivery and governance model that recognises Torres Strait's past and current success, while ensuring there is stronger accountability from all levels of government back to our people in communities.

Au Esowau Madam Chair for you time today and I hope this Forum will continue to monitor the positive work the TSRA is doing in partnership with its local stakeholders and the Queensland and Australian Governments in this very important area.

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