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**National
Native Title
Tribunal**



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JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

AGENCIES COMBINE TO SUPPORT NATIVE TITLE HOLDERS IN THE TORRES STRAIT

The Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC), National Native Title Tribunal (NNTT) and Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) have formalised arrangements to better support registered native title bodies corporate (RNTBCs) in the Torres Strait.

The Torres Strait has played an important role in the history of native title rights in Australia, with 2017 marking the 25th anniversary of the historic Mabo decision regarding Mer Island. There are now 21 RNTBCs in the Torres Strait that manage the native title rights and interests of Torres Strait Islanders. Most of these bodies were incorporated over 10 years ago.

In recent times the focus of traditional owners has moved to strengthening the governance of their RNTBCs and making better use of their native title rights and interests.

Under the new arrangements, ORIC, NNTT and TSRA have committed to improved cooperation and information sharing to assist Torres Strait RNTBCs with governance, native title training and dispute resolution. The aim is to build stronger and more capable RNTBCs.

‘When a dispute arises we find that the parties involved will often contact more than one of our agencies to assist,’ said Raelene Webb QC, President of the NNTT. ‘Each of us usually receives information focused on the aspects related to our separate jurisdictions, so we don’t get a comprehensive understanding of all the issues. To be effective, we need the full details so we have the power to assist.’

‘Our agencies agree that to achieve the best possible outcome for RNTBCs and traditional owners it’s important for us to work cooperatively, be more coordinated and treat governance and disputes in a holistic manner,’ said Napau Pedro Stephen AM, Chairperson of TSRA.

‘We want to ensure services in the region are coordinated, planned and designed for maximum effectiveness,’ said Anthony Beven, Registrar of Indigenous Corporations. ‘To this end ORIC is pleased to announce it has extended its regional network with a new regional office on Thursday Island.’

Kerry Lui has been appointed to the role and will work from the TSRA office on Thursday Island. Ms Lui will work with key stakeholders, communities and RNTBCs to identify needs and strategies for improving the governance of RNTBCs in the region.

The agencies have identified a number of important joint projects to work on such as reviewing rule books, delivering training, verifying membership lists and reducing the regulatory burden for RNTBCs.



Background

ORIC regulates and supports RNTBCs with registration advice, reporting assistance, corporate governance training and dispute assistance.

NNTT makes decisions, conducts inquiries, reviews and mediations, assists with native title applications and Indigenous land use agreements and provides information sessions and training for RNTBCs and other native title parties.

TSRA acts as the native title representative body for the region. It also assists traditional owners and RNTBCs secure legal recognition for native title, protect their native title rights, and support with capacity building initiatives.

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