

From: [REDACTED]

To: secretariat@rtirc.gov.au

Sent: Thu 8/12/2011 2:17 PM

Subject: RTIRC review

Dear Secretariat,

My name is Jeff Tanswell, and I am a Queensland Police Officer currently based on Thursday Island (off the tip of Cape York) and have approximately six years experience policing this area and addressing some of the challenges that come with this territory. I would respectfully like to make a submission to the Regional Telecommunications Review regarding the extent of the telecommunication services throughout the Torres Strait Region with a view to possible improvements that could be considered.

The Torres Strait Region covers an area between the tip of Cape York north to PNG has over 73 islands of which some 16 are inhabited with a total population of approx 9,000 persons.

Over the past 10 years mobile phone technology has taken off in this area with a majority of the indigenous population owning or having access to a mobile phone. The Torres Strait population is geographically wide spread with Boigu Island 80 nautical miles to the North of Thursday Island and Murray Island 120 nautical miles to the East hence one can understand that boats/watercraft are traditionally the primary mode of transport.

As Torres Strait islanders travel extensively between their respective island groups the Torres Straits unfortunately is one of the busiest areas in Australia for Search and Rescue incidents and it seems mobile phones have come to be relied upon as an essential tool when undertaking these journeys and it stands to reason given that mobile phones are relatively inexpensive, small and mobile, multipurpose, and easy to use. This has also made them a very important safety tool, as other safety communications devices such as marine radios are seen as simply too expensive and have no where near the numerous advantages of a mobile phone. So it is with this in mind that search and rescue authorities such as Qld Police have observed the following positive outcomes of mobile phone use in the Torres Strait area –

- a) Increased rate of distressed vessels calling family members and self rescuing
- b) Increased rate of calling Search and Rescue Authorities directly and requesting assistance.
- c) Search and Rescue Authorities can hone in and triangulate the last known area of a mobile phone use to assist with locating a missing vessel
- d) Greater co ordination when mob comms can be established with marine and land units that have mob coverage.

There are also a series of knock on benefits for any area that has mobile phone coverage especially for government agencies that operate in these areas such as police. The Qld Police have regular boat patrols throughout these islands and would be very supportive of any proposal to increase the mobile phone coverage in the Torres Strait area this would

enable Qld Police to access computer data bases whilst on scene and increase the ability for the general public (including health and education staff based on these islands) to access police assistance quickly.

The primary islands of concern for us include – Boigu Island, Mabuiag Island and Coconut Island, in that order, Boigu Island is our primary concern from a Search and Rescue perspective given that we have over 50,000 cross border treaty visits each year by PNG persons hence this is a high transit area and it is important to address this weakness.

Mabuiag Island is also subject to regular search and rescue activity and police regularly attend this island to investigate files hence improved telecommunications here would be seen as a great assistance. Coconut Island is subject to semi regular police visits however is located in another area of high search and rescue activity.

If I can be of any further assistance with additional information please contact me on the below mentioned number.

Jeff Tanswell

[REDACTED]

Thursday Island Police Station

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