

## **Queensland Police Service Cultural Appreciation Project**

# **Torres Strait Island Community Specific Information**

**Badu Island**

**Boigu Island**

**Coconut Island (*Poruma*)**

**Darnley Island (*Erub*)**

**Dauan Island**

**Hammond Island (*Keriri*)**

**Horn Island (*Ngarupai*)**

**Mabuiag Island**

**Moa Island - Kubin**

**Moa Island - St Paul's**

**Murray Island (*Mer*)**

**Prince of Wales Island (*Murulag*)**

**Saibai Island**

**Stephen Island (*Ugar*)**

**Sue Island (*Warraber*)**

**Thursday Island (*Waiben*)**

**Yam Island (*Iama*)**

**Yorke Island (*Masig*)**

## Preamble

The Queensland Police Service (QPS) has consulted with leaders in Torres Strait Island communities during the development of this package. Those individuals consulted have indicated the appropriateness of the content for the purpose intended by the QPS.

The Cultural Appreciation Project is part of an integrated program which is being enhanced and expanded throughout Queensland. The Crime and Misconduct Commission's report - *'Restoring order: crime prevention, policing and local justice in Queensland's Indigenous communities'* provides impetus to the program. In recognition of the constantly changing environment and dynamics of communities the information contained in the packages is subject to regular review to maintain currency and relevance. Suggested modifications or additions may be referred to the Cultural Appreciation Project Officer, Strategic and Cultural Policy, Office of the Commissioner, GPO Box 1440, Brisbane, Qld, 4001, telephone 07 3364 3934.



*The Torres Strait Islander flag is attributed to the late Bernard Namok of Thursday Island. The flag is emblazoned with a white Dari (headdress) which is a symbol of Torres Strait Islanders. The white five pointed star beneath it symbolises the five major island groups and the navigational importance of stars to these seafaring people. The green stripes represent the land, the black stripes represent the people, and the blue the sea. The flag as a whole symbolises the unity of all Torres Strait Islanders.*

**Disclaimer**

This document was compiled from community information which is liable to change over time. The information here should be used with discretion and checked if necessary. Users are encouraged to suggest amendments to the Cultural Advisory Unit.

This is a guide only, intended to give a better understanding of local culture and protocols. It is not intended to replace official policy or procedures. The relevant legislation, the *Queensland Police Service Operational Procedures Manual* and Thursday and Horn Island Police Stations' Standing Operating Procedures must be observed.

The Cultural Advisory Unit apologises for any distress that may be caused by naming of deceased persons in this document. No disrespect is intended.

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## Acknowledgements

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## Glossary of Terms

AQIS	Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service
CEA	Community Enterprises Australia
DM	Divisional Manager
HC	PBC Prescribed Body Corporate
QATSIP	Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Police
TO	Traditional Owner
TSIRC	Torres Strait Island Regional Council
TSIPSO	Torres Strait Island Police Support Officer
TSRA	Torres Strait Regional Authority

## Aim

It is important to recognise and understand the diversity between Islands throughout the Torres Strait relating to customs, religion, culture, social justice and language, however due to the demographic and complexity of the region it is not possible to identify all these differences in this guide.

The aim of this guide is to enhance service delivery by ensuring police appointed to perform duties within the Torres Strait, have been provided with information to assist with understanding cultural issues relating to the history of the communities, group/family dynamics, traditions, practices and events that impact on community-police relations.

Further information can be gained by reference to the following documents:

- Queensland Government's Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs site at: <http://www.datsima.qld.gov.au/atsis/everybodys-business>
- Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) Cultural Protocols Guide 2011 at: <http://www.tsra.gov.au/publications/tsra-cultural-policy.aspx>

## Reason for Training

Initial police training recognises the importance of cultural awareness in general. In-service training provides opportunity for further development through the Competency Acquisition Program (CAP) units:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australian Society - Race Relations (QC1004);
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australian Society - Government and the Law (QC1005); and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australian Society - Social Issues (QC1007).



It should be noted that these units deal with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies in a very broad and generic way. Various commissions and inquiries have recommended police receive cultural appreciation training that is more detailed and *community specific*, for example:

- Recommendation 210 of the *Royal Commission of Inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Report* [1991]; and
- Recommendation 123 of the *Review of the Queensland Police Service Report* [1996].

This information guide is a response to these and other recommendations.

## Introduction

The Torres Strait is a tropical marine environment located between the tip of Cape York Peninsula and the southern coast of Papua New Guinea. Boigu and Saibai are the northern most islands within the Torres Strait and are less than five kilometres from Papua New Guinea at the closest point. The Torres Strait consists of approximately 100 islands of which only 17 are inhabited.



Image provided courtesy of Wikipedia

The islands of Prince of Wales, Thursday Island, Horn Island, and Hammond Island are administered by the Torres Shire Council (TSC). All other Islands are administered by The Torres Strait Island Regional Council (TSIRC). Each outer Island community has a council office managed by a Divisional Manager as well as an elected Councillor. The TSIRC provide essential services to their communities.

Thursday Island is the main commerce and administration hub for the region and is approximately a two hour flight from Cairns. The airport is located on Horn Island, which is approximately eight kilometres from Thursday Island. Most Islands in the Torres Straits are accessible by light aircraft and there are regular services from Horn Island Airport. The Islands also receive a weekly barge service which supplies essential food items and fuel. There are also daily ferry services between Thursday Island, Horn Island, Prince of Wales and Hammond Island communities. A ferry service also operates between Thursday Island and Seisia in the Northern Peninsula Area (NPA).

'All island communities have a Registered Native Title Body Corporate (RNTBC) also known as the Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC) who represents the traditional land owners in all land dispute matters. Native title is a property right which reflects a relationship to land which is the very foundation of Indigenous religion, culture and well-being. The non-discriminatory protection of native title is a recognised human right.' [Australian Human Rights Commission](#).

For additional information regarding the Torres Strait Native Title refer to: <http://www.tsra.gov.au/the-tsra/native-title.aspx>

Employment prospects on the outer Islands are limited to government employment opportunities and a small number are private or community enterprises. Some of the government employment includes:

*Local level*

- TSIRC;

*State level*

- Queensland Health; and
- Education Queensland

*Federal level*

- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF);
- Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC); and
- Australian Customs and Border Protection Service.

## Historical Background

The people of the Torres Strait are of Melanesian origin with their own distinct identity, history and cultural traditions. Communal life was based on group memberships that were the predominant feature of life. Many of the activities of daily life were social activities which took place in the context of group activities of a ceremonial or ritualistic nature. The Islanders lived in organised groups of huts that were located along the foreshore immediately behind the beach. Village life revolved primarily around hunting, fishing, gardening and trading relationships.

The first recorded European contact with this area was in 1606 by the Spanish explorer Luis Vaez de Torres whom the Torres Strait was named after. In 1770, Captain James Cook

claimed Australia for the British and a monument remains today on Possession Island to commemorate this occasion. Anthropological records and research show that the present inhabitants of the Islands are descended from the people described in these early European visits to the area. Contact between Europeans and Torres Strait Islanders was put on a more or less permanent footing through Beche-de-mer fishing and pearl shelling which began in the 1860s.

Significant events in Torres Strait include the arrival of the London Missionary Society in 1871, establishment of Thursday Island as a settlement in 1876 and subsequently in 1879 the Torres Strait Islands were annexed as part of Queensland. This permanent presence of outsiders meant that the Torres Strait Islander culture was exposed to influences such as Christianity, capitalism, and foreign cultural systems that have greatly impacted on the Islanders' traditional ways.

More information can be viewed at the following links: [www.datsima.qld.gov.au/atsis/everybodys-business](http://www.datsima.qld.gov.au/atsis/everybodys-business)

## Demographics

Torres Strait Islanders, the Indigenous peoples of the Torres Strait, are of Melanesian descent. Thus they are regarded as being distinct from other Aboriginal peoples of Australia, and are generally referred to separately. However, it should be noted that the Kaurareg people who are of Aboriginal descent are recognised as Traditional Owners of Thursday, Prince of Wales, Horn and Hammond Islands.

According to the 2011 Australian census figures, the population of the Torres Strait Indigenous Region was 7,515 of which 5787 people were of Torres Strait Islander origin (77% of the population). The non-Indigenous population is generally made up of government and other agency workers including police officers, health practitioners and teachers.

## Torres Strait Treaty

Police in the Torres Strait work at the intersection of state, federal and international laws, regulations, policies, procedures and protocols relating to the policing of Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander communities. The Torres Strait is a unique policing environment sharing a border with Australia's closest neighbour, Papua New Guinea (PNG). The Torres Strait Treaty (the Treaty) sets the boundary between Australia and PNG and established the Torres Strait Protected Zone (incorporating much of the Torres Strait, see map below) to manage the region by way of protecting the traditional way of life of Torres Strait Islanders and the coastal people of PNG who live adjacent to the Torres Strait. The Protected Zone also protects the land and sea environment of the Torres Strait.

The Treaty allows free movement (without passports or visas) between Australia and PNG for traditional activities in the Protected Zone and nearby areas. A framework of laws, regulations, policies, procedures and protocols has been developed over the years to implement the Treaty.

PNG traditional inhabitants come from Bula, Mari, Jarai, Tais, Buji/Ber, Sigabadaru, Mabadauan, Old Mawatta, Ture Ture, Kadawa, Katatai, Parama and Sui (the 13 PNG Treaty Villages). These people can make traditional visits (free movement without passports) into the Protected Zone. PNG traditional inhabitants can travel south into Australia as far as the 10 degrees 30 minutes South latitude (near Number One Reef, north of Thursday Island). Australian traditional inhabitants come from Badu, Boigu, Poruma (Coconut Island), Erub (Darnley Island), Dauan, Kubin Village (Moa Island), St Pauls Village (Moa Island), Mabuigai,

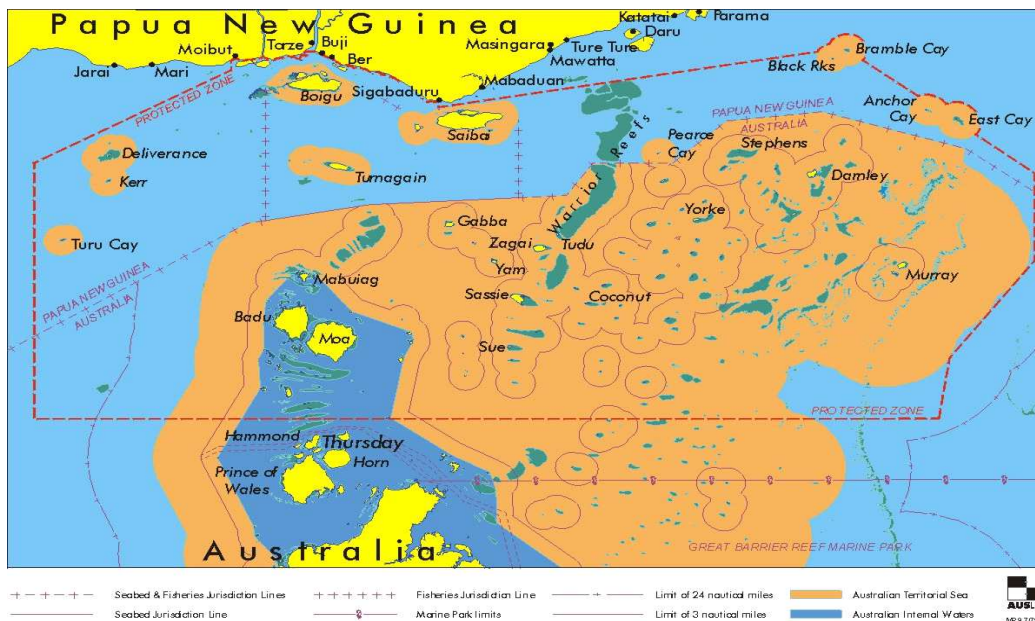
Mer (Murray Island), Saibai, Ugar (Stephen Island), Warraber (Sue Island), Iama (Yam Island) and Masig (Yorke Island). These people can make traditional visits to the PNG Treaty Villages and travel north as far as the 9 degrees South latitude (just north of Daru).

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has the overall responsibility for the Treaty and works closely with the Government of PNG, the Queensland Government and other Commonwealth Government agencies to implement the Treaty. DIAC have the responsibility for compliance of traditional treaty movements and employ Movement Monitoring Officers (MMOs) in island communities in the Protected Zone to monitor the arrival and departure of Traditional Visitors (TVs) and where required refuse immigration clearance to PNG nationals who arrive for a non-traditional purpose on island communities in the protected zone.

The following points provide a basic outline of the movement provisions under the Treaty. Traditional Inhabitants must obtain a prior advice notice requesting a visit signed by the registered signatory - the Village Chairman in the case of PNG, and a Councillor in the case of Australia. A Village Chairman or Councillor cannot sign a pass for someone from another village or Island:

- Free movement is only for traditional activities including gardening, collection of food, hunting, traditional fishing, religious and secular ceremonies or gatherings for social purposes (for example, marriage celebrations and settlement of disputes), and barter and market trade;
- Traditional visits **do not include** activities that are not traditional. Visits for health treatment, attending court cases, shopping at the store, picking up deliveries from the barge, baby sitting, working or accessing money from the ATM **are not** considered traditional activities;
- Traditional visitors can only travel by dinghy or canoe, not by airplane or helicopter;
- The Treaty bans commercial activity, business dealings and working for money during traditional visits (e.g. cray fishing from a licensed Australian cray boat, selling artefacts to commercial operators or paid domestic assistance). Selling goods in the knowledge that it may be on-sold is of commercial nature and is not permitted under the Treaty and is also counter to the spirit of the Treaty; and
- Traditional movement can be restricted for disease outbreaks, resource limitations (for example water shortages), and security or quarantine concerns.

For more detailed information on the Treaty please contact the Torres Strait Treaty Liaison Office (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Thursday Island) on 07 4069 1495 or see [http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/torres\\_strait/index.html#brief](http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/torres_strait/index.html#brief)



## Policing in the Torres Strait

Traditionally policing in the Torres Strait has been a partnership between the Queensland Police Service (QPS) and Local Government Authorities (LGA), namely Torres Strait Island Regional Council (TSIRC) and Torres Shire Council. Since Local Government amalgamation 14 outer Islands of the Torres Strait are encompassed in the TSIRC LGA. There are 15 communities on these Islands. Until 30 September 2013 TSIRC employed Community Police Officers (CPO) in 14 outer Island Communities and QPS employed 5 Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Police on Badu Island. As of 1 October 2013 the CPO transitioned to employment with QPS as Torres Strait Island Police Support Officers. QPS recognises the continued importance of a strong partnership with the LGA's in the Torres Straits. As of June 2015, the QATSIPs on Badu Island transitioned to TSIPSOs.

TSIPSO play an important role in the provision of policing services in the outer Islands providing community and cultural advice to attending QPS officers and assisting to maintain peace and good order in the communities where they serve.

The *QPS Vision for Strong and Sustainable Policing in the Torres Straits* has been developed to transition police service delivery in the Torres Strait from a predominantly reactive based model with limited contact with outer island communities to a more mobile and visible policing model over a 10 year horizon.

In July 2011, the Far Northern Region commenced the Torres Strait Policing Model (TSPM) which essentially utilises the QPS Air Wing (Islander aircraft – 'Baydhanaw Kupay') based on Horn Island and the Water Police Vessel (PV) Conroy, a Class A vessel, from Thursday Island as platforms for QPS staff to provide an increased proactive and reactive policing presence to the outer island communities. The QPS Air Wing provides daily flights approx four times per week to the outer islands and the PV Conroy provides a seven day patrol (twice per month) servicing up to three or four islands during each patrol.

*Highly visible* policing focuses on regular, scheduled patrols to achieve:

- Community engagement (School visits, community meetings etc);

- Inter-agency cooperation (Liaison with Government agency officers, Medical Centre liaison etc);
- Proactive policing activities (Education and awareness and Blue Light Discos); and
- Law enforcement.

Court sittings are held on each island several times throughout the year, creating the opportunity for matters to be heard locally. A diary of Court dates is available at Thursday Island Police station.

## Vessel Traffic

Dinghies are the primary method of transport in the Torres Strait. It is not unusual for Islander people to travel large distances between islands (on occasions over 200 kilometres). Due to the volume of vessel traffic between islands and the vast geographic area police are regularly involved in Search and Rescue (SAR) coordination. Water Police, Queensland Boating and Fisheries, Australia Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) and Maritime Safety Queensland (MSQ) staff work closely together to enforce maritime safety and legislation in the Torres Strait.

## The Torres Strait Marine Safety Program Role

Torres Strait Marine Safety Program (TSMSP) is a partnership between Australian Maritime Safety Authority, Maritime Safety Queensland, Torres Strait Regional Authority, Queensland Police Service and the National Maritime Safety Authority of Papua New Guinea. It provides a management structure and funding arrangements to address a number of agreed priority actions in line with the Torres Strait Marine Safety Strategy. The TSMSP is primarily involved in the delivery of education and training, the provision of subsidised safety equipment and a number of other initiatives which aim to improve maritime safety in the region

**1. Traditional Inhabitants Boats (TIB)** - Traditional licences and boat registrations are recorded on a database maintained by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF). There are in excess of 450 TIB in the Torres Strait Protected Zone (TSPZ) with unique commercial registrations that are not recorded by Queensland Transport and details of the vessels are not accessible on QPS computer systems. The TIB registrations are associated with a traditional commercial fishery licence allowing for traditional inhabitants to fish commercially on any boat that has a Torres Strait Traditional inhabitant fishing boat licence. Additional information can be located at [http://www.daff.qld.gov.au/28\\_15449.htm](http://www.daff.qld.gov.au/28_15449.htm).

TIBs are easy to identify as the registrations are made up of alpha characters representing where the vessel is from (island or NPA Community) followed by three numeric characters. Some examples are BAM123, BGU123, BI123, CN123, DU123, DY123, HMD123, INJ123, KBN123, MAB123, STN123, TDU123, and TRAWQ123.

**2. Commercially Registered Vessels** – All vessels used for activities undertaken for financial reward are considered commercial ventures. Vessels commercially operating in Queensland waters must be commercially registered through Maritime Safety Queensland.

## Cultural Considerations

### Language

English may be a second or third language for some Islander people, however English is widely understood throughout the Torres Strait. The languages spoken in the Torres Strait are:

- *Meriam Mir* – mainly spoken in the eastern islands;

- *Kala Lagaw Ya* – mainly spoken in the central and near western islands;
- *Kalaw Kawaw Ya* – mainly spoken in the top western islands; and
- *Torres Strait Creole* – is a common language used in the Torres Strait and has become a principal language of trade and commerce in the region.

## Time

Generally, Islander people have a different concept of time from non-Indigenous people. Unlike western society where the concept of time is based around hours and minutes, for Islander people the routine of life is set by seasons, events and phases of the day (such as daybreak or morning). In Queensland, this concept is sometimes referred to as 'Ailan (island) Time' for Torres Strait Islander people.

Officers should be aware of differing interpretations of time when organising meetings or community events. It is advisable to check with participants, but in a tactful way. Meetings should be scheduled with sufficient time for people to turn up and if necessary pickups should be arranged prior to important meetings.

## Traditional Areas/Significant Places

There are usually sites which are culturally significant for local people, e.g. burial sites, ceremonial sites on some islands. Seek advice from the PBC/Elders/Traditional Owners before attempting to visit these sites. To do otherwise 'shows no respect'. If police are off duty when visiting island communities and wish to go fishing, hunting, camping or sightseeing, permission must be sought from the Traditional Owners of that area. Police are showing respect to Traditional Owners by asking permission. This is particularly relevant while on outer Island patrols (e.g. TSPM) – always check with Traditional owners/elders before going ashore on any un-inhabited Islands as they may be a significant place.

## Traditional Hunting

While in the Torres Strait, police will most likely come across traditional hunting of turtle and dugong. Due to the political and cultural sensitivity of traditional hunting, it is best to ask the people involved for permission to approach them to observe. Generally it is okay to ask questions, however it is important to seek permission before taking any photographs or video footage of traditional hunting practices.

## Exemptions for Traditional Hunting

Under s. 14 of the *Fisheries Act 1994*, an Aboriginal person or Torres Strait Islander may exercise traditional or customary hunting or fishing rights. This means that activities which would otherwise be unlawful may be lawful where they are carried out in accordance with Aboriginal tradition or Island custom. There is no definitive list of such activities therefore each case must be decided on its merits as it arises.

## Deaths (Sad News/Sorry Business)

Across all Torres Strait Island communities, respect for the deceased and their relations is paramount and an important part of community dynamics, sometimes for lengthy periods. Police are expected to play their part. Whether the death is reportable or non-reportable, communities look to police to assist with the removal of the deceased to the morgue or place of viewing and to provide other assistance as appropriate, depending on the situation and the wishes of the family. This may include, for example, notifying other family members or providing transport for Elders.

Traditionally, when a person passes away it is the responsibility of an in-law of the deceased to coordinate all aspects of the mourning period and funeral. This person is known as the

spiritual hand or “mari gedth” and it is important for investigating officers to identify who this person is and use this person as the point of contact. Not complying with this can be seen as disrespectful and cause further grief.

### **Mydth (Black Magic)**

*Mydth, Maidem or Maid* is also known as ‘black magic’ and is a common held belief in Island communities. It is one term used to mean a practice related to perceived magic, usually related to consequences of past actions. It has been likened to a curse in other belief systems.

According to traditional belief, certain behaviours or cultural breaches can have dire consequences including bad luck, illness or even death. Certain spirits, entities, or signs are often seen as precursors to these events. Police should take the matter seriously when told mydth is involved. Talk of mydth causes fear and may lead to other disturbances; families may accuse other families of ‘bad business.’

The Community Justice Group and police may mediate with involved parties when allegations are made. Mydth is not practised in all Island communities, however there is generally a belief in consequences for action and a belief in the role of ‘spirits’ and other entities.

### **Family Dynamics/Traditional Adoption**

In Torres Strait Island communities the term ‘family’ refers to an extended family group. For example, the death of a second cousin will have the same impact on the family dynamics as the passing away of a sibling.

Understanding these family dynamics is important in identifying respected members who provide a key leadership role in these groups. Issues that arise between family members are often complicated by blood and marriage relationships. Such relationships present privacy and confidentiality issues.

The terms ‘Aunty’ and ‘Uncle’ are in common use to signify respect. People may be called Aunty and Uncle even if they are not related. For police, the use of the terms ‘Aunty’ and ‘Uncle’ can assist in breaking down barriers with respected community members. Advice should be sought from TSIPSOs on approach protocols for using these terms in each Island community.

The term ‘traditional adoption’ refers to when the birth parent/s of a child gives that child to another family member to be their child and in doing so, relinquishes obligations towards the care of the child as well as authority to make decisions about the child. ‘Traditional adoption’ ensures that the child is raised with extended links to the birthparent’s family and the link to kinship and culture is maintained.

### **Customary Law**

Traditionally, the Elders of the community administered the “law” by which everybody abided and decided on appropriate punishments for offenders. While this traditional system is not currently recognised by state legislation, it is still present within the collective consciousness of community members.

Customary law punishments were in most cases dealt with very soon after the offence had occurred. With this traditional practice in mind, some Island people have trouble understanding the reason for the time delay in the court system. For example, there is difficulty comprehending why it may take two years for an offender for a serious offence to appear in court. For this reason, it is imperative that police continually update victims.



## Elders

Although Elders can play many roles within the community, they are essential stakeholders with regard to family conflict and may assist in dispute resolution. It is important for police officers to develop both rapport and respect for community Elders and use their authority to assist in resolving incidents. If visiting Island communities it is beneficial to spend time if practicable to discuss general issues with Elders and gain an understanding of issues that are impacting on their families and community.

## Considerations for Policing Island Communities

### Communication

In addition to effective interpersonal communications skills, it is important that outsiders understand the behavioural and communication protocols within the Torres Strait. If these are broken or not respected, Islander people become offended and communication breaks down. Islanders' views and meaning systems vary from that of other cultures, although in some aspects there will be similarities. In situations of cross cultural communications there is always a risk that ideas may be misinterpreted and this can lead to considerable confusion, misunderstanding, disappointment and even resentment. (Refer TSRA Cultural Guide 2011.)

Communication issues include not only language but also style of communication. Gestures and the use of silence are features of non-verbal communication in Torres Strait Island culture. Potential difficulties can be eased if you begin a conversation with the cultural protocol of identifying who is who, asking questions such as:

- What is your name?
- Where do you come from?
- Who is your family?

Be prepared to share information about yourself and your family. This establishes rapport and enables you to have ongoing communication and build a relationship. When talking about business, take time to build the relationship first, and then introduce business when you have developed a rapport. It is also important to explain why something is happening and try to make it clear why you are seeking information.

It is acceptable for officers to use Torres Strait Islander words such as 'wa' for yes, 'esso' for thank you and 'yawo' for goodbye during communication and this will assist in breaking down barriers between police and Islanders especially the youth. Most community members are willing to teach 'outsiders' Islander language words and terms,

For further information on communication protocols with Torres Strait Islander people refer to the following links:

<http://www.datsima.qld.gov.au/atsis/everybodys-business/protocols-for-consultation-and-negotiation-with-torres-strait-islander-people>

### Community Involvement

Community attitudes to police are often mixed. New officers can use the TSIPSOs as a point of introduction to community members. In general, community members welcome the opportunity to meet with police and open the way for further communication.

*Note: It is not usual to make contact with Elders without gaining an introduction by someone you know.*

Remembering names is a big step towards forming relationships. People are also more receptive when your approach is friendly, open and casual. Distance and isolation restricts officers from becoming involved in Island community life. Officers are strongly encouraged to participate in traditional community policing initiatives such as school visits, Blue Light Discos and liaising with Elders and Councillors. When visiting the outer Island communities on the PV Handran, it is not uncommon to invite community leaders back to the vessel for an informal gathering. These approaches should be focused on being welcoming and developing open and friendly dialogue with the visiting guests.

## **Community Engagement**

If you are attending or organising a meeting below are some important considerations:

- Thank the community for taking its time and allowing to meet with them;
- Acknowledge the traditional owners of the surrounding land and sea;
- Contact TSIRC Divisional Manager and seek advice on appropriate persons to contact;
- Contact TSIPSO to establish any local protocols or customs that should be considered for your meeting;
- Ensure that the meeting can be opened and closed with a prayer;
- Ensure that someone is available to bless the food at each meal time;
- Organise catering from a local provider;
- Provide the agenda to your key contact people to ensure input on the items to be discussed and format for the meeting.

## **Professionally**

When attending outer Island communities for routine matters a courtesy visit should be made to the office of the Divisional Manager TSIRC on the Island and if available the Divisional Councillor. This is a good opportunity to discuss if there are any issues in the community which need to be addressed. Prior to attendance contact should be made with the TSIPSO in the community to advise of police attendance and ascertain if there is any cultural events or ceremonies which may mean attendance is not appropriate at that time.

However it is acknowledged that there will be some incidents that notification or contacting the community leaders may not be possible or appropriate for operational reasons such as major incidents, high risk operations and confidential intelligence driven operations. Some community members may not agree with police responses to urgent situations and police may be questioned if this situation arises, so it is important for officers to explain to the community the urgency of the response.

Police must work with the TSIPSO, TSIRC, Queensland Health and Education Queensland and community groups such as the Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC), Community Justice Groups (CJG) and Women's Group. It is therefore important to develop a working rapport with these key stakeholders. It is also important to gain an understanding of the dynamics of the family groups and how they fit within the hierarchy of the community. For example if an officer is seen to communicate with one family group significantly more than other families, there will often be speculation/perception in the community that the officer is 'favouring' that family. This can make it difficult to gain the trust of other families.

## Privately

It is important to engage in traditional community policing activities during short Island visits such as school visits and Blue Light Discos.

It is also important to recognise and be involved in special events being conducted in the community including:

- Annual commemorations including Mabo Day, Coming of the Light Festival, NAIDOC Week; and
- Torres Strait Cultural Festival (held every two years); and
- Major sporting events such as Zenadth Kes Cup (Torres Cup) and Island of Origin rugby league carnivals, Battle of the Islands Touch Football carnival.

## Perceived Police Conduct

Rumours/community perceptions of alleged police 'misconduct' or 'abuse of powers' can cause community anger and spark disturbances. This can be particularly relevant if a person has been arrested and removed from the Island community. If the removal of a person is required then this action should be planned and coordinated with the local TSIPSO. Consideration should be given regarding the dignity of the person and the impact on the community regarding their actions. For example, it is not appropriate to remove someone from places where people, including children, have gathered (store, school, church, family gatherings). All efforts should be made to avoid the removal of persons in front of children.

It is good practice to keep relevant members of the community informed after significant incidents and use this opportunity to explain/justify any course of action taken by police. Members also need to be mindful of their conduct when off-duty. Any perceived misconduct or inappropriate behaviour whether on or off duty can greatly impact the reputation of the member, the QPS and can also damage the established working relationships between the QPS and the community.

## Respect

An officer who does not have the respect of the community can be a danger to him/herself and to other officers. An officer also needs respect to form effective partnerships with the community. Respect and trust cannot be gained from people without knowing the community and the community knowing you. It takes time to build rapport and to gain the local knowledge you need to function effectively.

A few rules of behaviour are:

- Speak civilly to people and treat everyone with dignity, for example speak in a way you would like to be spoken to;
- Be humble in situations where it is appropriate;
- Be especially respectful to elderly members of the community;
- Be consistent in your dealings with people;
- Be honest with people and tell them the truth; and
- Do not promise things you cannot deliver.

## Immediate Mourning Period

Respect is shown for the family during this period. The family should be left to grieve, and non urgent police action with family members should be reconsidered until after the funeral.

Consideration should also be given to cancelling planned visits to the Island during this period. It is often the case that family members will take on specific roles such as messenger, funeral coordinator and wake organiser. These positions provide 'space' for the direct family to grieve. A family member's residence will usually be nominated as the place for family to gather on a daily basis until the funeral.

## **Death Messages**

There are specific protocols that must be adhered to in relation to delivering death messages within Island communities. It is not acceptable to deliver a death message to a direct relative of the deceased. The message must be delivered to the councillor or the Registered Native Title Body Corporate. If they are not available sufficient enquiries should be made to identify an appropriate in-law to deliver the message.

As Torres Strait Island communities are small, families will often hear of the death of a relative prior to police delivering the message. Family of the deceased person may also live elsewhere (people can be in transit between major centres including Brisbane, Rockhampton, Townsville, Cairns, Mount Isa or other Indigenous communities). It may be appropriate to ask the question, do you want family in other places to be told?

## **Morgue**

There is a morgue located on Thursday Island. In the case of deaths on the outer Islands, the health clinic can hold the deceased person for a short time prior to being transported to the Thursday Island morgue.

In cases where the death is suspicious, tact must be used to balance the family expectations of access to the deceased person with the integrity of the investigation. Families usually want the deceased person's clothing and other items back.

## **Funerals**

Relatives of the deceased person are likely to come from wide and varied places, travelling great distances, to attend the funeral. Police usually maintain a low profile during the time of a funeral. Any enforcement operations should be conducted with tact and sensitivity. However, Island residents still expect, and want police to perform their duties during this period.

It is not unusual for police to be invited to attend a funeral in the Torres Strait. To accept this invitation is a sign of respect even though the officer may not know the deceased.

## **Cultural Leave for Employees**

Island communities being generally small communities, people are often related and/or know each other well. A death therefore can affect the whole community, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees of the QPS and other government agencies. Torres Strait Islander employees may be absent from work due to cultural obligations. The Human Resource Management Manual outlines Cultural Leave Entitlements for employees'.

## **Tombstone Openings**

Tombstone openings take place at the grave of a deceased person one year or more after burial. The tombstone is ceremoniously unveiled (opened). This is also an occasion where family gathering and feasting takes place. It is not unusual for police to be invited to events like this and they are a good opportunity to experience Torres Strait Island culture.

## Community Justice Groups

A number of Island communities have a Community Justice Group (CJG) which is an organisation formally recognised by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. These groups have representative community membership including Elders. CJGs generally assist with court matters where recommendations are made to the Magistrates in relation to sentencing and may be a powerful mechanism for resolving serious incidents as well as mediating between family groups.

Liaising with the Justice Group Coordinator can assist in resolving issues, understanding family group dynamics as well as developing community projects and programs. For more information about justice groups refer to:

<http://www.justice.qld.gov.au/communityjustice-groups.htm>

## Criminal Investigations

Due to cultural considerations that are gender related, Islander males will often prefer to speak to male officers. Likewise, Islander females will often prefer to speak to female officers. This is an important consideration when facilitating investigations in the outer Island communities.

## Child Protection

Any investigation in relation to alleged sexual abuse of children needs to be dealt with sensitively due to shame/embarrassment of the family involved. Sexual contact between relations is prohibited by 'customary' law and incest is never culturally acceptable.

On occasions police are requested to assist Department of Child Safety officers in child protection investigations. The aim of the Department of Child Safety is to intervene in the least obtrusive manner. However, in extreme circumstances where a child is at significant risk, police may be requested to assist in the removal of children from their parent or caregiver.

As in non-Indigenous society, the removal of children from their carers can be a traumatic experience for all concerned. The extended family relationships are central to the way the Island communities are organised. The removal of a child affects not only the immediate caregivers but also the extended family unit, which means there is an emotional impact on a significant number of persons within the community.

## Youth Justice Issues

Outer Island communities within the Torres Strait have primary schools however secondary school students either attend Tagai State College on Thursday Island or one of the many boarding schools located throughout the State. This transition and separation from family units is often difficult for some secondary students who return to the Islands during school holiday periods. These youth returning for holidays can put additional strain on some community resources including youth facilities and police.

The youth of Island communities are being more influenced by urban culture. Limited facilities and programs are available to young people during school holiday periods. Blue Light Discos are facilitated as part of the police patrols of these communities. Many of the outer Island communities have sport and recreation officers who operate youth engagement activities during these school holiday periods however most young people occupy themselves with traditional activities such as fishing and hunting.

## Domestic and Family Violence

Domestic and Family violence has no basis in tradition and is not part of Torres Strait Islander culture. There are limited external agencies such as Women's Shelters and Men's Support

Groups available on outer Islands when responding to domestic violence matters and victims will often seek the support of family members to overcome these issues. The seriousness of the matter will determine an immediate response by police or whether the matter will be dealt with at a later date during regular Island visits.

## **Liquor Licensing**

There are currently licensed premises on Thursday Island, Horn Island, Bamaga and Badu Islands. There are also licensed canteens in operation in some of the outer Island communities with restricted trading hours.

There are no alcohol restrictions in the outer Island communities and plane and barge services are used in a private capacity to transport alcohol into these communities. However some Islands have a permit system that requires residents to gain permission from the Island Councillor to transport alcohol to the Island. Such permit systems are not legislated and as a result not legally enforceable.

## **Watchhouse**

Police Watchhouse facilities are located on Thursday Island and Horn Island. There are no Watchhouses located in the outer Island communities however the PV Handran is a designated station/holding cell.

## **Summary**

The culture, traditions, historical background and geography of the Torres Strait make the area, and the people, a unique part of Queensland. An appreciation and awareness of these aspects of the Torres Strait and its people can greatly assist police both personally and professionally to effectively engage with the community. The practical information contained in this document provides a brief overview of the traditional beliefs and history of the Island people, however police are strongly encouraged to take the time to immerse themselves in the distinct culture of the region whilst living and working in the Torres Strait.