



Torres Shire Council

*To Lead, provide and facilitate a sustainable,
safe and culturally vibrant community*

MEDIA RELEASE

25 JANUARY 2026

Heightened concerns over multiple foreign fishing vessels spotted travelling “undetected” throughout the Torres Strait Islands in Queensland, Australia.

Torres Shire Council is gravely concerned for the safety and security of the people of the Torres Strait in light of the recent surge in illegal foreign vessels and nationals entering Australian waters.

This undetected travel through the Torres Strait is unacceptable especially considering the taxpayer investment in the region including the multi-million dollar "high-tech" Saibai Facility installed to ensure the safety of our borders. It seems there is still a lack of urgency regarding communication and accountability to our region's communities and leadership. We should not have to be informed through social media or by our community networks.

Our constituents are worried about their safety and security in our communities and the possible exploitation of our Fisheries. Our communities depend on healthy seas for food, culture, and income. Seeing illegal activity so close to shore raises real fears about stock depletion, environmental damage, and unfair pressure on local and regulated commercial fishers who follow the rules.

Apart from the immediate safety risks, the related health and biosecurity concerns are placing our communities, especially our elders and young people, at risk in an already vulnerable region.

The surge in recent border breaches — including incidents currently unfolding — must prompt broader conversation around increasing resources for our northern border communities. This is not only about responding to incidences but preventing them through consistent border presence and strengthened local capability.

When a foreign vessel can get within 100 metres of the mainland, people quite naturally begin to worry about what else may be entering our waters undetected. This creates very real safety and security concerns for local families.

Mayor Elsie Seriat OAM said “Our island communities have contacted both the Council office and myself expressing deep concern regarding the illegal vessels passing by and, more alarmingly, landing on their islands. Residents are asking why these boats are not being

intercepted before entering Australian waters and wanting to know who is responsible for ensuring the safety of our community.”

Mayor Seriat continued to say, “I find these incidents extremely worrying for our region and will be pursuing answers at every level.”

The Torres Strait and Cape York are strategically significant, environmentally sensitive, and closely watched by the people who live here. Australia cannot afford a mindset that assumes remoteness equals invisibility.

Our community continues to be put in the position of monitoring Australia’s international borders. This is obviously not enough to secure the nation, especially when they have no authority to detain while waiting for federal officials to arrive.

The fact that our waters still contain multiple gaps where foreign nationals continue to cross into Australian waters undetected is deeply troubling for our region and should be for all Australians.

Torres Shire Council is demanding a briefing from relevant authorities regarding this latest incursion and will work with the regional leadership to prioritise a locally led solution for surveillance, reporting and interception.

The goal is to ensure the safety and security of the people of the Torres Strait and to protect the fisheries from exploitation.

Mayor Seriat appreciates the diligence of the Torres Strait communities in reporting unusual activity and asks residents to remain vigilant as we seek further answers and direction from all authorities.

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