mina mir lo ailan mun

Proper communication with Torres Strait Islander people

Department of
**Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander
Policy and Development**

foreword

"For many years non-Islanders have worked with Islanders to resolve issues of disadvantage, and to improve the level of services and the standard of living in this distinctive part of Australia.

While there has been a good deal of success, it needs to be stated that on far too many occasions projects and programs did not reach their full potential. This was due not so much to a lack of material resources, but to a lack of understanding on the part of those not familiar with Islander ways.

At the heart of the problem of relationship and communication breakdown is the dissimilar world views of Islander and non-Islander societies. If social and cultural values and historical experiences are not understood and respected, there is enormous scope for misunderstanding, disappointment and resentment on both sides.

Mina Mir Lo Ailan Mun provides insight and background to cultural and historical factors that affect the way Torres Strait Islanders live today. It offers practical guidance to improving communication between Islanders and non-Islanders, and will be of great assistance to newcomers who wish to establish relations with Torres Strait Islanders. It will also assist non-Islanders who are already familiar to us.

I therefore highly recommend *Mina Mir Lo Ailan Mun* as a guide to improving understanding and communication between us all. I look forward to seeing the benefits of this document unfold in the future".

Getano Lui AM
Chairperson
Island Co-ordinating Council

introduction

Mina Mir Lo Ailan Mun has been written as a guide for government officers and others working within the Torres Strait region.

The first section of the booklet deals with traditional Islander society and contact history. The information in this section provides the essential historical, cultural, social, economic, religious and political background necessary to understanding the nature of contemporary Islander and non-Islander interaction.

The second section of the paper deals with cross-cultural communication. In this section we have tried to alert officers to the barriers and delights in cross-cultural communication, as well as indicate ways in which these barriers may be dealt with.

Inter-cultural communication is about the exchange of meanings between people of different cultural and social systems. Our own version of meaning is derived from our own cultural background and institutions. Therefore, when Islanders and Europeans exchange meanings, neither side passively absorbs the other side's meanings. Rather, each side reconstructs them to make them fit into their own ways of looking at the world.

Obviously, in this exchange, there is always the risk of an idea from one culture losing all or some of its significance when it is being considered by another's culture. Hence officers working in the Torres Strait need to adopt a more considered approach to their interaction with Islanders. They can do this by developing interpersonal skills, communication techniques and consultation strategies.

Consultation is not done on an issue-by-issue basis, but rather it is an *ongoing* process grounded on respect for Islander culture, flexibility, the building and nurturing of relationships, information sharing and accountability.

An important aspect of accountability towards Islanders is that it is an acknowledgment of the legitimacy of their desire to negotiate the terms of the policies and programs that directly affect them.

In the past, consultation with Islanders was either non-existent or conducted in a shallow and ineffectual way. Unfortunately, we wear the legacy of past mistakes. The way forward is to ensure that our contacts with Islanders are carried out in a way that their views and aspirations are heard, understood and taken into account.

It is also important to bear in mind that Torres Strait Islanders have a distinctive regional identity. However, be aware that there are also differences between the various Islander communities.

The people of the Torres Strait are of Melanesian origin with their own distinct identity, history and cultural traditions. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century the rhythm of Islanders' lives, their meaning systems, world view, and social processes were relatively autonomous. However like all cultures, their various cultures were dynamic and accepting of change.

Islanders lived in established communities and village life revolved around hunting, fishing, gardening, and trading relationships, with emphases varying according to local conditions. Material life was interwoven with relationships which were conducted in the language of family, kinship, home island, totemism, and spirituality.

In cultural and religious life the foremost concerns were warfare, headhunting, sorcery and, among some, an obsession with the pursuit of supernatural power. Individual possession of secret magic was believed to be essential to the success of daily pursuits such as gardening, hunting and sailing.

The universal principles sustaining Islander social structure and relationships were kinship and reciprocity. Ritual, celebration and exchange of gifts were a large part of their social and spiritual life.

The economy of the Torres Strait was based on subsistence agriculture and collecting food from the sea. Inter-island trading in food, weapons, and artefacts was also a key component of group relationships.

Trade also existed between the Torres Strait and the Western Province of Papua New Guinea and between the Near Western Islands and Cape York. The trading relationship with Papua New Guinea was of vital importance, because it was the source of the heavy timber needed to make sailing canoes.

Torres Strait Islander traditional life in the pre-contact period was heavily affected by the Papuan influence in terms of trade, social organisation and language.

Linguistically, the Torres Strait is split with *Meriam Mir* spoken in the Eastern Torres Strait, and *Kala Lagaw Ya* spoken in the Central and Western Torres Strait. In the top Western communities of Saibai, Boigu and Dauan a dialect of *Kala Lagaw Ya* called *Kalaw Kawaw Ya* is also spoken. The *Meriam Mir* language is a member of the Papua New Guinean Eastern Trans-Fly family. *Kala Lagaw Ya* and *Kala Kawaw Ya* have an Aboriginal structure but with Melanesian elements.

Another language known as *'Broken English'* was brought to the Torres Strait by the South Sea Islanders in the latter part of the 19th century. Over time, this language developed into a Creole, which has become the lingua franca of the region.

1.1 Contact History

The Torres Strait was named after the Spanish adventurer Luis Baez de Torres who visited the area in 1606. Prior to Torres' voyage there were indications of Islander contacts with people from the nearby Asian region. In 1770 the Englishman James Cook claimed Australia for the British.

Contact between Europeans and Torres Strait Islanders was infrequent between 1770 and the 1840s. When contact did occur it was sometimes cordial and sometimes violent.

Contact between Europeans and Torres Strait Islanders was put on a more or less permanent footing through Bêche-de-mer fishing and pearl shelling which began in the 1860s. The establishment of both these industries was accompanied by forced labour, violence and abductions.

In 1871 the London Missionary Society (LMS), using teachers from the Loyalty Islands in New Caledonia, set up operations on Darnley and Dauan Islands. The LMS's operations gradually expanded to include the other Torres Strait Islands.

The settlement of Thursday Island was founded in 1876 and in 1879 an Act of the Queensland colonial Parliament made the Torres Strait Islands part of Queensland.

The permanent presence of outsiders meant that Torres Strait Islander culture was exposed to four powerful influences: Christianity; colonialism; capitalism; and foreign cultural and knowledge systems. Inevitably, all four influences created inter-cultural conflicts.

Colonisation of the Torres Strait was not accompanied by wholesale and violent seizure of Islanders' land. Their land tenure systems were relatively undisturbed. Also, the foreign cultural influences to which the Islanders were exposed were as much Polynesian and Asian as they were European.

With regard to the Christian influence, the missionaries attempted to destroy the Islanders' traditional beliefs. Nevertheless, the Islanders did not reject Christianity. The Islanders may have been attracted to Christianity for three reasons. Firstly, Christian doctrine was partially compatible with traditional religion.   Secondly, the missionaries provided some protection and guidance to Islanders in their dealings with foreigners in the marine industry. Furthermore, missionaries played a leading role in putting an end to the vicious cycle of warfare, headhunting raids and abductions.

Colonialism in the Torres Strait consisted of three distinct phases. These were indirect rule, paternalist exclusion, and controlled integration.

Indirect rule was the form of European control during the period 1879 to 1904. Under this system the Government Resident on Thursday Island appointed head-men on the inhabited Islands. The nature of Islander society allowed this form of control to be effective. These head-men were able to appoint a number of assistants who were given police powers. The head-men had magisterial powers but in reality were always subordinate to the LMS missionaries in their communities.

In 1904 the Queensland Government decided to take over control of the Island communities from the LMS, and to treat the Islanders in the same way as Aboriginal people. The Island communities were declared Reserves, segregated from the outside world, and virtually every aspect of Islanders' personal, domestic and community affairs was controlled by the local Protector. This phase of colonial policy has been described as paternalist exclusion. Accordingly, Torres Strait Islanders lost their rights as British citizens and became wards of the State.

The third phase of colonial policy was controlled integration which began in the mid 1960s. This amounted to a continuation of the policies and practices of paternalism and segregation, but appropriately adjusted to accommodate the labour needs of capitalist expansion.

Islander participation in the money economy took place in the context of the three phases of colonialism, that is, under conditions determined by others.

While Islanders had traditionally exploited marine resources, such as mother-of-pearl, for trading and ceremonial purposes, their intimate knowledge of marine resources was not valued by the Europeans. What the latter valued was Islander labour because it was cheap.

The two aspects of the introduced economy most resented by Islanders were forced labour and controls over their earnings. Nevertheless, Islanders remained enthusiastic about participation in the marine export economy (Bêche de mer, trochus and mother-of-pearl) because they saw it as a means of increasing their self-reliance.

Islanders resented government policies which denied their humanity and their desire to control their own livelihoods and futures. Resentment was so intense that on New Year's day 1936 they decided to strike.

The 1936 strike was the first time the Torres Strait Islanders had collectively organised in order to challenge European authority. Islanders had stood up and insisted on being treated with dignity and respect. The significance of the 1936 all-island maritime strike was the emergence of a regional identity. The strike was not primarily about wages and conditions; rather it was about the Islanders' right to control their wages and their own affairs. In other words the strike was about equality and autonomy.

The Queensland Government did make some concessions. In 1939 they introduced more progressive legislation which provided for elected local government councils. These councils gave the Islanders a greater role in the day-to-day running of their communities. However, the policy of maintaining broad controls over Islanders' lives continued for several decades.

Despite the continuation of these control measures, other events impinged on Torres Strait Islanders' lives and had the effect of strengthening their identity rather than weakening it. These events were the Second World War, the opening up of the mainland labour market, the 1967 Referendum, the 'border issue' of the 1970s, the move for sovereign status in the late 1980s, and the Murray Island Land Case.

Islanders who served in the defence forces during World War II experienced a new comradeship with white men. To some degree this countered the master-servant link that Islanders experienced under Queensland Government policies. Over 700 Islanders joined the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion. Their 'army time' renewed their consciousness of their natural abilities and rights, and gave them new skills and the know-how and confidence to change their situation. Many white soldiers supported the Island soldiers' strike for equal pay in 1943.

The enlistment of most Islander males caused the women left in the communities to take on extra functions and duties. Women became breadwinners and providers as well as assuming greater decision-making roles.

By 1955, when pearl-shell and trochus markets were in the final stages of collapse, a number of Torres Strait Islanders were permitted to migrate to the mainland to search for employment.

Torres Strait Islanders working on the mainland were free of the controls over their movements and earnings exercised by the Queensland Government. Formally, though not in practice, they enjoyed the same civil rights and privileges as other Australians.

The migration of large numbers of Torres Strait Islanders to the towns and cities of the mainland did not cause an irreversible split in Torres Strait Islander society. Those that moved continued to identify themselves as Torres Strait Islanders and maintain close ties with their home communities. The enduring link between the experiences of life on the mainland and the experiences of life in the Islands is kinship. For instance, large numbers of Islanders from the Torres Strait region and various mainland locations still regularly come together for what is called a 'Tombstone Opening' - the formal unveiling of a commemorative stone over the grave of a deceased relative. On these occasions Islanders acclaim family honour and their unity as a distinct people.

The 1967 Referendum gave the Commonwealth Government the power to take national responsibility for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people. The Commonwealth's intervention challenged the Queensland Government's monopoly over official access to Torres Strait Islanders and provided a new source of funds which improved the Islanders' bargaining power because they were in a position to play one government off against the other.

The 'Border Issue' of the 1970s was also a unifying experience for Torres Strait Islanders. The Torres Strait Islanders opposed a proposal to cede that part of the Torres Strait above latitude 10° South to an independent Papua New Guinea. The Torres Strait Islanders had stood up as 'one community' for the social, cultural and geographic inseparability of their Island homelands. The 'Border No Change' campaign was strongly supported by the Queensland government which resisted moves by the Australian government to accommodate more fully the wishes of Papua New Guinea. The Treaty settling the border issue between Australia and Papua New Guinea recognised the unity of the whole of the Torres Strait.

On 20 January 1988 sections of the Torres Strait publicly expressed their desire to secede from Australia. This 'Call For Independence' was an expression of a distinctive Torres Strait Islander identity, as well as a response to government policies that had institutionalised inequalities.

It was also seen by some Islanders as a 'theatrical gesture' to attract high level attention to serious Islander concerns.

A further symbol of a distinctive Torres Strait identity emerged in 1992 when the Torres Strait Islanders' flag was first flown.

The year 1992 was significant for another reason. It was the year the High Court handed down its judgement in the Murray Island land case. The High Court's recognition of Islanders' customary land tenure upheld the essential continuity and integrity of Murray Islanders' culture and custom. The Islanders' culture and custom had not been obliterated by contact with an expanding colonialism and capitalism. The Islanders' right to their property and resources had not been extinguished. The past had continued to co-exist with the present.

Over the past 200 years Torres Strait Islanders have coped with many pressures and intrusions from domineering outsiders. They have adjusted their traditional ways in the light of these influences and continue to sustain and renew aspects of their culture. It is important that people working with Torres Strait Islanders are aware of their historical struggles as well as their current and ongoing concerns.

1.2 Profile of the Torres Strait

The Torres Strait is a unique cultural, historical and geographical region of Australia. It is located between Cape York and Papua New Guinea. The Strait consists of approximately 100 islands of which 15 are inhabited and administered by Community Councils. These Councils provide essential services to their communities. The region has an international border with Papua New Guinea.

The population of the Torres Strait is approximately 8,000 of whom 6,300 are Islanders of Melanesian descent. Most outer Island populations are between 100 and 500.

The administrative and commercial centre of the region is Thursday Island. Thursday Island, Horn Island and Prince of Wales Island has a population of about 4,000.

The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) and the Island Co-ordinating Council (ICC) are the recognised Commonwealth and State peak bodies to be consulted on regional needs.

Most Islands are accessible by light aircraft and there are regular services from Horn Island. The Islands also receive a weekly barge service which supplies essential food items and fuel. The Islanders Board of Industry and Service (IBIS) operates retail stores on the outer Islands and Thursday Island.

Each community has adequate water and electricity systems.

The Queensland Education Department operates Primary Schools on the outer Islands. Thursday Island hosts Primary and Secondary schools and a College of TAFE. All outer Islands also have medical health centres operated by the Queensland Department of Health. All Islands receive at least 2 television channels and have telephone services. Limited postal and banking services are also available.

Employment prospects on the outer Islands are limited. Most people are reliant on the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) and Social Security benefits for their basic incomes.

Some Islanders are also involved in subsistence gardening and fishing as well as commercial fishing. Others are employed in a variety of public sector positions including Health, Education, Customs, Quarantine and Local Government.

Island Councils receive grants from the Commonwealth and State Governments to assist them in their operations.

1.3 Local, Regional and Community Organisations

Local

There are 17 Island communities with local government status established under the Queensland *Community Services (Torres Strait) Act 1984.* These are Badu, Bamaga (Cape York), Boigu, Coconut, Darnley, Dauan, Hammond, Kubin, Mabuiag, Murray, Saibai, Seisia (Cape York), St Pauls, Stephen, Warraber, Yam and Yorke.

The functions of the Island Councils are to provide for the well-being of the residents of their communities, and this includes the making of by-laws and the provision of physical infrastructure and essential services.

The Torres Shire Council incorporated under the Queensland *Local Government Act* provides municipal services on Thursday Island and on Horn and Prince of Wales Islands.

Regional

The *Island Coordinating Council (ICC)* was officially established in 1984 under the Queensland *Community Services (Torres Strait) Act 1984.*

The functions of the ICC are to advise governments and others on matters affecting the progress and well-being of Islanders and to make recommendations to the State Minister on matters relating to the administration of the *Community Services (Torres Strait) Act 1984.*

Membership of the ICC consists of the 17 Chairpersons of the Island Councils plus one representative from Tamwoy on Thursday Island.

The other regional body is the *Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA)* which is a Commonwealth Statutory Authority. It was established on 1 July 1994 under the Commonwealth's *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989.*

The functions of the TSRA are to represent the interests of Islanders to all levels of government and to improve the economic, social and cultural status of Islanders.

Membership of the TSRA consists of the 18 people on the ICC plus one elected representative from the Port Kennedy area of Thursday Island, and one elected representative from Horn Island and Prince of Wales Island.

Community

There are a number of community organisations in the Torres Strait that deal with particular issues. The main ones are:

Far North Queensland and TSI Corporation for Legal Services

Horn Island Women's Group (housing and women's rights)

Kaurareg Tribal TSI Corporation (land matters)

Keriba Kazil TSI Corporation (services to the disabled)

Mura Kosker Sorority (women's issues)

Nurapai Torres Strait Islanders Corporation (housing)

Port Kennedy Association (community welfare)

Tamwoy Development Association (housing and community development)

Torres Strait Co-operative Ltd, (housing)

TSI Media Association (broadcasting)

Torres Strait Museum and Cultural Association Ltd

Torres Strait Home for the Aged

Torres Strait Youth, Recreational and Sporting Association

Torres Strait Islands Regional Education Committee.

T.R.A.W.Q Community Council represents the residents of the suburbs Tamwoy, Rose Hill, Aplin, Waiben and Quarantine on Thursday Island.
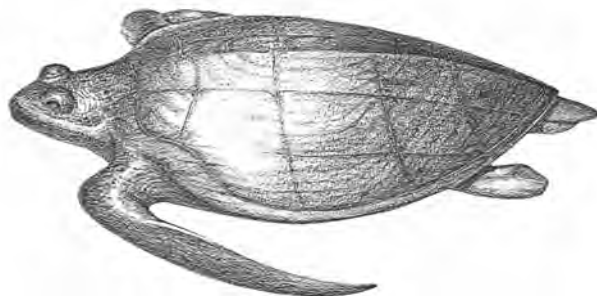
1.4 Significant Issues in the Torres Strait

Cultural Identity

- Recognition and respect as a distinctive people.

- Preservation of customs, laws and language.

- Relationship to land and sea.

The Regional Political Framework

- Self-management.

- Rights rather than handouts.

- New relationship with Commonwealth and State governments.

- Effective institutions and processes.

- Fair representation within political structures.

- Relationship with Papua New Guinea - the Torres Strait Treaty.

- Security on international border.

Social Well-Being

- Acceptance by the wider community of Islander values and practices.

- Fair access to culturally-appropriate health services, education and training, employment, housing and physical infrastructure.

- Community development planning as a means for community empowerment.

- Status of women.

- Effective crime prevention strategies.

Economic and Natural Resources

- Raising Islanders' incomes and standards of living.

- Financial independence rather than reliance on government.

- Greater participation in sustainable industries such as fisheries and tourism.

- Environmental management and planning.

- Improvement of physical infrastructure to assist industries and enterprises.

- Maximising Islander employment in the service sector.

- Control of land and sea.

Communicating with those unfamiliar to us does not come easily. The more distant and unacquainted the cultures are the greater the challenge. Therefore, good communication requires the parties to truly understand each others' social systems.

It is important that outsiders understand the behavioural ground rules of the Torres Strait, because if the latter are broken 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 cross-cultural communication there is always a risk that ideas will be misinterpreted, and this can lead to considerable confusion, misunderstanding, disappointment and even resentment.

There is also the problem of dissimilar concepts of social process. In traditional Islander society both the spiritual and the secular were interwoven, and this is still evident today. However, in European society the two are usually separated.

Compounding these differences are past policies of segregation, paternalism, neglect and isolation which have not been erased from Islanders' minds. Similarly, contemporary policies, considered to be progressive and enlightened by some, do not necessarily enjoy widespread support among the Island communities. For instance, land rights legislation introduced by the

Queensland Government in the early 1990s was rejected by many Islanders. In addition, bureaucratic procedures often do not sit comfortably with the Island fashion or way of doing things.

All of these factors are barriers to effective communication and will need to be overcome if inter-cultural dialogue is to be more productive. Fortunately, there are ways and means of improving communication with Islanders.

Interpersonal Skills

The cornerstones of sound communication are interpersonal skills.

Most people will not care to deal with you unless you can demonstrate that you are sincere, trustworthy, open and honest. Torres Strait Islanders are no different in this way.

It does help to have a reasonable knowledge and appreciation of Torres Strait Islander custom and history. If you have this knowledge you will be better able to empathise with people and issues.

Taking a genuine interest in people without being intrusive helps foster ongoing relationships. Being helpful and friendly is particularly appreciated. Torres Strait Islanders place a good deal of emphasis on courtesy and kindness. This is known locally as 'Good Pasin', meaning good fashion or behaving with a degree of sophistication and charm. Failure in this area can be irreparable.

It is also absolutely essential to tell the truth at all times, no matter how unpopular this can be. Failure to do so destroys credibility which is unlikely to be regained.

Above all treat people the way they want to be treated, instead of the way you think they should be. *Genuine respect for their beliefs, opinions and lifestyle is essential.*

2.1 Communication Techniques

There are a number of techniques that can be used that will help with your dealings with Torres Strait Islanders. To be successful these will obviously need to be used in a sincere rather than a manipulative way. They also need to be practised regularly.

Listening

Listening is most important. This means listening without interrupting. It means listening without being selective and assuming that you know what people are going to say. It means actually listening and not just pretending to listen. Islanders will want to fully explain their position to you and this often takes time. Being attentive and patient while they are informing you will be appreciated. It will also help establish a good relationship.

In situations where communication is sensitive or tense it often helps to be empathetic and to paraphrase. After Islanders have finished talking, you can summarise and repeat what they have told you. By doing this you signal that you are serious about their views and that you have a clear understanding of them.

When introducing an idea carefully observe the response to it. If the idea has little or no support this will generally be conveyed by silence. Sometimes it is difficult not to interrupt and not to finish partially completed sentences. This is partly because some cultures are uncomfortable with silent pauses. It may also be that we are in a hurry to obtain an answer and complete the task. We need to become more comfortable with silences. Allow time for people to think about the idea and for them to discuss it informally among themselves.

Questioning

It is often impolite to ask too many questions. Direct questioning may cause offence and consequently be ineffective. Nevertheless, it is quite important to seek input; but listen carefully to replies to see whether your questions were already answered in the earlier responses given.

It is also important to provide time for answers to be thought about and even talked about. This can take weeks in some consultation contexts.

Language

Whilst English is often not people's first language it is nonetheless widely understood.

As most Islanders have a good understanding of English you would talk with them in much the same way as you would with your friends and colleagues. It pays to quickly make your own judgement on the individual's level of English and adjust accordingly.

Where English is not so strong, you need to consider the choice of vocabulary, rate of delivery, clarity and logical ordering of ideas. The style needs to be understandable, free of jargon and appealing. Do not speak loudly or in a patronising manner.

Occasionally it may be beneficial to use interpreters. In these instances you need to be confident that what you are saying is understood and translated correctly.

These principles also apply to written communication.

Finally, sign language and gestures are frequently used to express points of view in the Torres Strait. This usually occurs between Islanders themselves; however, this can be extended to others as relationships grow and improve.

22 Consultation and Negotiation Strategies

With regard to consultation, it is crucial to keep in mind that it is a process and that the process is as important as the outcomes. It is therefore a good idea to adopt a systematic approach. Anyone conducting a consultation would therefore need to:

- Be conscious of the dissimilarities between the two cultures' ways of viewing the world.

- Be committed to the process and prepared to devote time and resources to it.

- Understand that the consultation process needs to be open, equitable and flexible. For a consultation to be successful, the people and organisations being consulted need to believe that their participation is valued and respected. These people and organisations would need to be confident that their ideas and input will be taken into account. Failure to do so will generate considerable resentment and cynicism.

- Have a thorough understanding of the nature and origin of the issue, program or problem they wish to discuss.

- Determine who are the appropriate people, organisations and government agencies to contact and the likely ways they will interact. That is, have a good knowledge of the organisational, social and political context. Who will participate? Who will support? Who will resist? Who will oppose? Who will co-operate?

- Provide the people, organisations and government agencies with sufficient information to make the consultation meaningful, valuable and productive.

- Determine what type or combination of types of consultation are appropriate.

- Expect Islanders to be indifferent or hostile to ideas and proposals that are incompatible with their ways of thinking and lifestyle.

- Anticipate questions and issues that are likely to arise during discussions among participants, and outline options for dealing with those issues.

- Continually monitor and evaluate the consultation process in order to improve methods and communication.

When actually discussing an issue, allow the community leaders to pace and manage the meeting. Islanders often prefer to discuss matters in their own language. Be relaxed about this. *The outsider has a participatory role, not a controlling role.* Furthermore, do not expect to resolve issues in one meeting, and do not push for an instant decision. If you push hard you might be able to get a decision but it will be one which community leaders and residents may not regard as binding.

Other general rules to keep in mind are:

- Always be open, honest and sincere.

- Never make any promises you cannot deliver. Explain carefully the constraints within which you work which may mean that recommendations are not automatically accepted even when you fully support them.

- Try not to refuse proposals outright. Advise communities about other opportunities to achieve their objectives and assist them to establish relations with the appropriate funding body.

- Always seek co-operation from the Community Council before going to a community.

- Familiarise yourself with behavioural protocols in Island communities. This will develop over time with patience, good observation skills, and perhaps guidance from a competent person who is familiar with the process.

- Respect religious protocols such as grace before meals and the practice of opening and closing meetings with prayers.

- Respect 'Ailan Kastom' (Island Custom) such as Island adoptions. These have legitimacy in the Torres Strait

- Avoid intruding on significant cultural events such as funerals and tombstone openings.
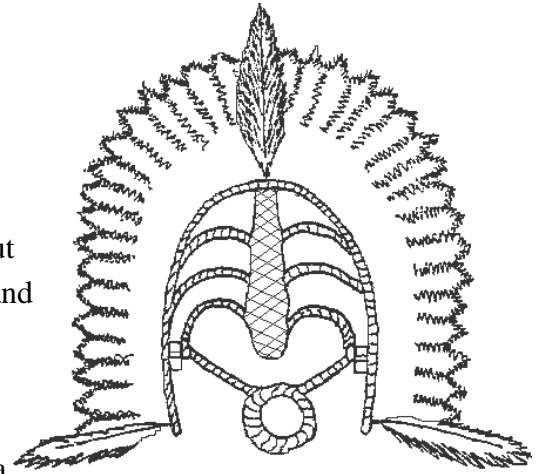
- Understand 'Ailan Time' (Island time) - meetings may not start when scheduled.

- Do not cause anyone to suffer the loss of personal dignity.

- Avoid direct criticisms of particular individuals.

- Be careful with the use of humour; it may be misunderstood.

- Be patient, tactful and discreet.

- Avoid talking excessively, particularly in the company of elders.

- Stick to formal addresses when talking to chairpersons and councillors until given permission to do otherwise.

- Do not be submissive; be organised, professional, confident and helpful.

- Never underestimate the breadth and depth of knowledge in the community and the technical skills available.

- Dress appropriately because poor dress standards may offend.

- Be aware that there are distinct boundaries between males and females and practice appropriate behaviour at all times.

- If in doubt about protocols, ask and find out.

Consultation and negotiation is not a time-specific process. It needs to be recognised as an ongoing and essential component of the policy making process in Islander affairs. It also needs to be seen as a process founded on networks of relationships that require to be continually developed and nurtured. It is important to remember that discussions in informal settings 'after hours' may be of as much, if not more, assistance than formal meetings.

It goes without saying that if relationships are to last they need to be based on trust and mutual benefits. However, maintaining relationships in the policy process is not easy; they are often chaotic and explosive. There are also entrenched negative attitudes both of and towards those in public sector positions which compound the problem.

The key to successful consultation is relationship building. The latter can only be achieved by officers developing an empathy with, and understanding of, the socio-cultural dynamics of Islander communities. If officers make themselves accessible and accountable to people and organisations in Islander communities, they will enhance their credibility and help build positive attitudes.

3 | further information

Staff of the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Policy and Development are available and willing to facilitate any consultation/negotiation process including offering help in identifying the appropriate people/groups to consult. Important agencies to be aware of are:

Island Coordinating Council
PO Box 501
Thursday Island Qld 4875
Ph: (07) 4069 1446
Fax: (07) 4069 1868

Torres Strait Regional Authority
PO Box 261
Thursday Island Qld 4875
Ph: (07) 4069 1247
Fax: (07) 4069 1879

Ministerial Advisory Council on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education (MACATSIE)
PO Box 33
BRISBANE ALBERT STREET Q 4001
Ph: (07)323 70807
Fax: (07)323 70289
EMAIL: alison.bell@qed.qld.gov.au

Joint Ministerial Advisory Council on Housing and Infrastructure (JMAC-HI)
Executive Officer
GPO Box 70
BRISBANE Q 4001
Ph: (07)322 51929
Fax: (07)322 76736

Nagi Binanga (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee on Employment, Training and Industrial Relations)
C/- Executive Officer
      Locked Mail Bag 527
        GPO BRISBANE Q 4001
          Ph: (07)3247 5451
            Fax: (07)3247 5433

Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Forum
Chairperson
4 Quirk Street
THE GAP Q 4067
Ph: (07)330 06502

Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research (FAIRA)
37 Balaclava Street
WOOLLOONGABBA Q 4102
Ph: (07)339 14677
Fax: (07)339 14551
EMAIL: letterbox@faira.org.au
INTERNET: www.faira.org.au

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board
Chairperson
PO Box 397
BRISBANE ALBERT STREET QLD 4002
Ph: (07)322 47995
Fax: (07)322 47329
1 800 812 409

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC)
State Office
GPO Box 2472
BRISBANE Q 4000
Ph: (07)3234 4222
Fax: (07)3221 6008
INTERNET: www.atsic.gov.au

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)
GPO Box 553
CANBERRA ACT 2601
Ph: (02)624 61111
Fax: (02)624 97310
EMAIL: EMAIL:@elc.aiatsis.gov.au
INTERNET: www.aiatsis.gov.au

NOTE: The Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development will be publishing a complementary document which provides a description of the role of the organisations listed in this section.

4 cultural communication cues

Accept	that you are in another social and cultural world.
Acquire	a sound knowledge of Torres Strait Islander culture.
Adopt	a participatory role rather than a controlling role.
Allow	time for people to think about ideas and proposals and to discuss them informally amongst themselves in their own language.
Analyse	situations or problems carefully and in detail to provide an appropriate solution or outcome.
Anticipate	barriers in cross-cultural communication because of the opposing conceptual systems.
Appraise	each meeting or contact situationally ~ no two visits or meetings are alike.

Build	enduring relationships with community groups.
Develop	healthy working relationships with Councils; Communities; Organisations; and Individuals; promote goodwill and understanding between all parties.
Disseminate	information or ideas broadly across all stakeholders in a fair and equitable manner ~ ensure no one is disadvantaged.
Encourage	participation in discussions, meetings and forums.
Endeavour	to be open, honest and sincere.
Expect	resistance to ideas and proposals that are incompatible with Islander values.
Familiarise	yourself with the socio-political profile of the community you are working in.

Identify	key stakeholders in the community including Chairpersons; Council members; Elders - both men and women; and respected younger people possessing higher education.		**Talk**	in a style that is clear, understandable, free of jargon and acronyms.
Listen	to people's views and take them seriously, keep in mind that your perspectives and concepts may differ from others - give a little, listen a little, learn a little to find out what the other party needs.		**Understand**	cultural and community dynamics - stereotyping should be avoided as each community is unique and each have their own individual needs.
Promise	only what you can deliver or are capable of acheiving.			
Respect	people's customs, culture, values, religion, dignity and feelings.			

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