

Summary of discussion and key outcomes

Torres Strait Cross Border Health Issues Committee meeting 30 October 2014 in Cairns, Australia

The Torres Strait Cross Border Health Issues Committee (HIC) met in Cairns, Australia, on Thursday 30 October 2014. The HIC is a biannual forum to identify health issues arising in the Torres Strait Protected Zone and South Fly coast of Papua New Guinea (PNG), and members work collaboratively to identify appropriate strategies and resources to address these concerns.

Members welcomed the new HIC Co-Chair, Mr Graeme Barden, from the Australian Government Department of Health (DoH). Members noted the minutes of the meeting of 2 April 2014 and progress on actions arising from previous meetings.

HIC members continued discussions on ways to improve communications in the Torres Strait Protected Zone. In this context, the DoH provided advice to the HIC on plans to purchase and install high frequency radios in Treaty Villages along PNG's South Fly coast. This project will seek to improve communications between Treaty villages, Daru General Hospital and Queensland to support health care, and will also assist in the coordination of search and rescue activities. Installation of the radios is expected to occur in late 2014-15.

The PNG National Department of Health reported on the establishment of a tuberculosis (TB) Emergency Response Task Force to control the spread of multi-drug resistant (MDR) and extensively-drug resistant (XDR) TB in PNG; a new TB community awareness campaign; and implementation of PNG elements of the *Joint Australia-PNG Package of Measures to address Cross-Border Health Concerns*. In particular, members welcomed advice on plans to upgrade the Bula, Buzi and Sigabadaru Aid Posts to Community Health Posts, with funding of almost K5 million allocated for this purpose.

International examples of best practice cross-border MDR TB control programs, and their applicability to the PNG context, were discussed and will be considered further by members out of session.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) provided an update on Australia's ongoing support for TB management in Western Province, as well as a planned package of support to strengthen TB services in the National Capital District.

Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service outlined proposed TB awareness and education activities they will undertake in the Torres Strait Protected Zone using Commonwealth funding.

The HIC noted reports from its Clinical Collaboration Group; the Torres Strait Communications Officer; Queensland Department of Health, on the treatment of PNG nationals in Queensland health facilities, tuberculosis notifications and communicable disease surveillance; the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, on numbers of cross border movements; PNG's Provincial Health Office, on health activities in the South Fly District of Western Province; and DFAT, on progress in planning for the new Mabaduan Health Centre.

Members noted that Dr Geoff Clark will shortly be finishing his role with DFAT as Counsellor, Development Cooperation in Port Moresby. Members thanked Dr Clark for his significant contributions to the HIC, as well as to broader PNG health issues and policies over many years.

The next HIC meeting will be held in late March or early April 2015 in Cairns, Australia.