

## ***Summary of discussion and key outcomes***

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### **Torres Strait Cross Border Health Issues Committee meeting 8 October 2015 in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea**

The Torres Strait Cross Border Health Issues Committee (HIC) met in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, on Thursday 8 October 2015. 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 a number of new members, including from Australian Border Force and Australian Department of Agriculture and Water Resources. Members noted the minutes of the meeting of 29 April 2015 and progress on actions arising from previous meetings.

PNG National Department of Health (NDOH) provided an update regarding the PNG Government Tuberculosis (TB) Emergency Response Team. The rate of retention of patients on treatment in Western Province is improving and is now above 90 per cent. Members welcomed progress to date, and noted that more work is needed to implement planned activities, requiring the provision of adequate funds. Members welcomed PNG's decision to extend the Emergency Response Team for a further 12 months and noted the important contributions of partners, including affected communities, in implementing the emergency response.

PNG NDOH provided an update on its implementation of the Package of Measures and infrastructure development along the border areas, including: plans approved for the Australian funded Mabaduan health facility; and designs for Sigabadaru, Bula and Buzi health facilities. PNG NDOH noted that the construction of new facilities cannot proceed at this time due to budgetary constraints. The Committee encouraged efforts be made to secure financial resources to enable infrastructure development.

PNG's Western Province Provincial Health Office provided an update on health activities in the South Fly District. The Committee encouraged PNG NDOH to prioritise the roll-out of the National Health Service Standards health services gap analysis, role delineation, and a province-wide health services plan for Western Province. Members noted progress towards the establishment of a Provisional Health Authority for Western Province and the new District Development Authorities. Members noted that the South Fly District drug storage facility has now been completed and is awaiting final certification before commencing operation.

Members reconfirmed HIC's continued support for the current health care initiatives within the Treaty villages and the Committee's support of the desires of the Traditional Inhabitants for improved allocation of human and financial resources to enhance implementation as soon as possible.

The Committee noted the continued and new Australian investments through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) totalling \$44.7 million from 2011-17. These investments are contributing in 2015 to improvements in diagnosis, laboratory services, access to treatment and community engagement, including through support to PNG's National TB Program.

The Committee noted that there has been pleasing progress on the Mabaduan Health Centre. The tender for site works has just closed; and building will commence

this financial year. The project will take approximately 9 months, with the Health Centre expected to open by the end of 2016.

DFAT has also: invested in PNG human resources, technical and program management; the procurement of medical supplies for TB and drug resistant (DR) TB as well as laboratory services; continued support for the refurbishment of Daru General Hospital; and resumed the Medics Queen operation in June 2015.

The Committee noted that Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service (TCHHS) has undertaken community-based TB education sessions in the Torres Strait, and endorsed TCHHS undertaking similar visits in the PNG treaty villages.

The Queensland Government Department of Health (QDOH) provided updates on notifications of communicable diseases and TB in the Torres Strait. QDOH also updated the Committee regarding the HIV treatment of a small number of PNG nationals resident in Queensland, with QDOH and the PNG NDOH agreeing to share information regarding the management of these patients.

Members agreed the importance and value of its sub-committee, the Clinical Collaboration Group (CCG), and supported its continued operation. The Committee acknowledged ongoing assistance from DFAT and Queensland to the CCG via provision of funding and secretariat support.

The Committee agreed to establish a time limited working group to consider issues and propose processes to enable cross border medical evacuations from the Torres Strait to Daru General Hospital under prescribed circumstances, to be considered by the CCG at its next meeting.

The next HIC meeting is tentatively scheduled for March / April 2016 in Cairns, Australia.