

## **Question on Notice**

**No. 1308**

**Asked on 26 October 2021**

**MS C LUI ASKED MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT AND FISHERIES AND MINISTER FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES (HON M FURNER)—**

### **QUESTION:**

Will the Minister advise how the Palaszczuk Government is assisting the Torres Strait through education about biosecurity threats?

### **ANSWER:**

The Palaszczuk Government is actively involved in public awareness and education of biosecurity threats to the Torres Strait community. In particular, the Far Northern Biosecurity Initiative, the Exotic Fruit Fly Eradication Program and the African Swine Fever Prevention and Preparedness Project have all provided an increase in community engagement staff resources and activities to not only highlight the biosecurity threats from our northern neighbours, but also from mainland Australia.

In recognising and respecting the unique Torres Strait culture, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries has a locally recruited Senior Project Officer based on Thursday Island who can provide biosecurity advice to the public in local language and in a culturally appropriate manner. In addition, the department has also recently produced an educational animation in the Torres Strait Creole language which seeks to educate local communities in how to reduce biosecurity spread risks between islands and the mainland.

The department uses a broad range of communication media to maximise the ability to reach the community and deliver biosecurity messaging. Due to the remote nature of many of the Torres Strait communities, social media is widely used. The department regularly utilises paid social media posts which geo-target the Torres Strait communities with messages around new pest or disease incursions, biosecurity threats to look out for, and other biosecurity related information. These social media posts direct the community to websites and factsheets which have been developed specifically for the Torres Strait.

The department's Indigenous project officer also has regular sessions on Torres Strait and northern Cape York radio to promote seasonal or topical biosecurity issues. Biosecurity awareness is further increased by using electronic noticeboards in community supermarkets, posters in high use public areas, signage and fruit amnesty bins.

The department works closely with Federal and Local Government officers to ensure the use of joint communication where possible to promote the biosecurity collaborations which occur between all levels of government in the Torres Strait. An example of this collaboration is the joint biosecurity information stalls at all major sporting carnivals and cultural events.

The Torres Strait communities appreciate face-to-face engagement, which the department has undertaken over the past year to several outer islands including Badu, Masig, Poruma, Boigu and Mer. These visits include community education sessions, primary school talks and meetings with local community elders to discuss biosecurity issues of concern. The school

visits have been very popular with the students, as they learn how to lure invasive ants, use GPS devices and collect data.

Departmental staff have also presented at island Council and traditional owner peak body Board meetings, recognising the importance of educating the elected representatives of the diverse Torres Strait region.

Lastly, but critically important, over the past year, the Palaszczuk Government has invested in education of the key biosecurity first-responders based in the Torres Strait, the local government Environmental Health Workers and the Indigenous ranger groups. This has included biosecurity traineeships for local government staff and training of Council staff from all communities in animal biosecurity and welfare, plant biosecurity surveillance, invasive ant sampling and Biosecurity Act compliance.