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TORRES STRAIT REGIONAL AUTHORITY

SUBMISSION TO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

**Inquiry into community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander Communities**

FEBRUARY 2009

TOR 1: Food supply, quality, cost and competition issues

Remoteness underpins a range of issues that impact on the development of the Torres Strait and its people. Remoteness is exacerbated by factors unique to the region - its island composition and dispersal of its population.

High cost of living and limited choice occurs across the whole range of goods and services including food, social services, housing, transport and telecommunications.

The Torres Strait community experiences higher-than-average costs compared to mainland Australia when purchasing foodstuffs, owing to the additional burden of freight costs - most goods are landed by sea from Cairns - and the small market which reduces the option of bulk wholesale purchasing. Fifty percent of the twenty communities consulted in late 2008 as part of the (ongoing) regional planning process indicated that freight costs were too high, and sixty-five percent indicated that fuel costs were too high.

There is no ferry linking the outer islands with the main administrative centre on Thursday Island or the regional airport on Horn Island. A private ferry service used to operate between the islands however the service ceased due to high fuel costs and other operational issues including the suitability of the boat to travel to the outermost islands.

Regular passenger transport flights in the Torres Strait (between islands) ceased in September 2008. Flights between islands are now only by way of plane or helicopter charter, which is very expensive. This exacerbates the cost and quality of goods and services as items such as fresh bread are now being delivered throughout the islands by barges.

Some specific concerns raised during the regional community consultations were:

- The high cost of fuel. A twenty-litre drum of fuel in the western island communities can cost \$60 and a litre of outboard oil over \$11, which impacts on the ability to undertake hunting and gathering, which families rely on to supplement their food supply. This has also had a profound effect on the vessel running costs for Indigenous commercial fishers and makes it even more difficult for local fishers to make a profit.
- The high cost of goods, especially on outer islands, which are shipped from the mainland via Thursday and Horn Islands, compared with the level of CDEP wages:
 - Costs make it difficult for those on CDEP wages to provide for their families on a weekly basis (it costs \$150 per week for food which would barely provide for a single person)
 - Fifty-five percent of communities consulted identified that CDEP wages are too low to meet the cost of living in the region

- Almost thirty-nine percent (38.7%) of Torres Strait Islander households within the Torres Strait Region earn less than \$315 gross weekly income (compared with 31.1% for Torres Strait Islander households living elsewhere in Australia and 8.0% for non-Indigenous Australians).¹
- Vegetables and fruit are limited in variety, relatively poor in quality due to time taken to ship in, and sell out quickly from community stores.
- The supply of food to outer island stores is insufficient to meet demand/population size. One island community of approximately fifty people (Ugar) does not have a community store and residents are forced to travel by vessel (sometimes in rough seas) to the nearby community of Erub thirty kilometres away to purchase their supplies.

Products attract variable mark-ups, ranging from ten - eighty percent, depending on volume, perishability and demand. Deteriorating fresh food remains on the shelves at un-reduced prices.

Fresh foods are delivered intermittently, with the consequence that shelf quality is frequently poor. The quality of fruit and vegetables on the store shelf is also diminished by excessive or rough handling and sub-standard cool storage.

The price of goods is not helped by the dominance of one freight company in the region - Sea Swift - which limits the access to fresh produce (thirty-five percent of communities raised this issue) and monopolises the freight market to the region (fifty percent of communities raised this concern).

There is considerable variation in the productive potential of the Torres Strait Islands, particularly with respect to soil chemical and physical constraints. Each island, however, faces similar climatic constraints and the vast majority of islands, with the exception of the inner islands, have water availability issues. Thus, communities have difficulty producing high enough yields to support island populations. Twenty-five percent of communities consulted said they sourced a limited supply of fresh fruit and vegetables through these means. As a result of not having regular access to fresh produce, there is a tendency towards unhealthy foods. One community has advised TSRA that '[the] costs of groceries are preventing people from eating healthy [and] improving health outcomes [by closing the gap]' (refer to TOR 3).

Limited domestic or market gardening means over-reliance on imported goods. District Health, Education Queensland, TSRA and other agencies are increasingly encouraging and funding community garden projects (to promote locally grown produce for economic, health and environmental reasons), but these are as yet too

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics & Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008. *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*. Canberra: ABS & AIHW: 253

few and on too small a scale to impact on general supply or change of life-style (refer to TOR 3).

The availability, variety and cost of fresh meat supplies are issues of concern to TSRA, as part of an ongoing strategy to address sustainable harvests within the turtle and dugong fishery.

Dugong and turtle are traditional sources of meat for Torres Strait communities. However, to ensure the fishery is sustained into the future, a combination of strategies are required to maintain adequate populations including the development and implementation of management plans which propose cultural hunting restrictions, supported by the community. As well, the ability to offer incentives such as alternative meat supplies at a subsidised rate on Thursday Island, Horn Island and the outer communities would contribute to a reduction over time.

The price, freshness, availability and diversity of alternative meat are areas requiring concerted intervention in order to give local people greater choice and move them away from the current norm of stocking a supply of dugong/turtle meat in the freezer. The issue of frequent consumption in Torres Strait is one of many pressures the community is working on in sustaining the fishery.

Limited demand results in limited choice. The choice of produce on the shelves of the retail outlets is influenced by demand and awareness, but also the decisions and initiative of the retailers/suppliers. Cheaper brands may sell better but are often less healthy options. However, 'no-name' brand products, for example the Black & Gold range, can in fact be just as expensive as 'name brand' products in the Torres Strait: twenty-five percent of communities indicated last year that there were no cost savings in purchasing the 'no-name' brands.

There is a need for greater government action to counteract cost of living issues in general and cost of food in particular through subsidisation of transport and freight in some way and provision of alternatives, for example, providing public transport to improve connectivity between the islands and exploring alternative lower cost fuels (also with lower environmental impact), given the reliance on diesel and small vessel travel. Further, greater support for initiatives that aim to increase local production of fresh foods is required.

TOR 2: The effectiveness of the Outback Stores model, and other private, public and community store models

The Islander Board of Industry and Service (IBIS) is the predominant supplier of produce in the Torres Strait. It has several outlets on Thursday Island, an outlet on twelve of the outer islands (in some cases the IBIS store is the only store), and owns the Bamaga Supermarket in the Northern Peninsula Area.

IBIS is a not-for-profit organisation constituted under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities (Justice, Land and Other Matters) Act 1984*. Acknowledging the limited market due to population size, and cost of freight and associated issues mentioned above, IBIS still operates as a virtual monopoly in the region, which means that there is little competition to drive down prices or to encourage IBIS to innovate and offer better quality and variety.

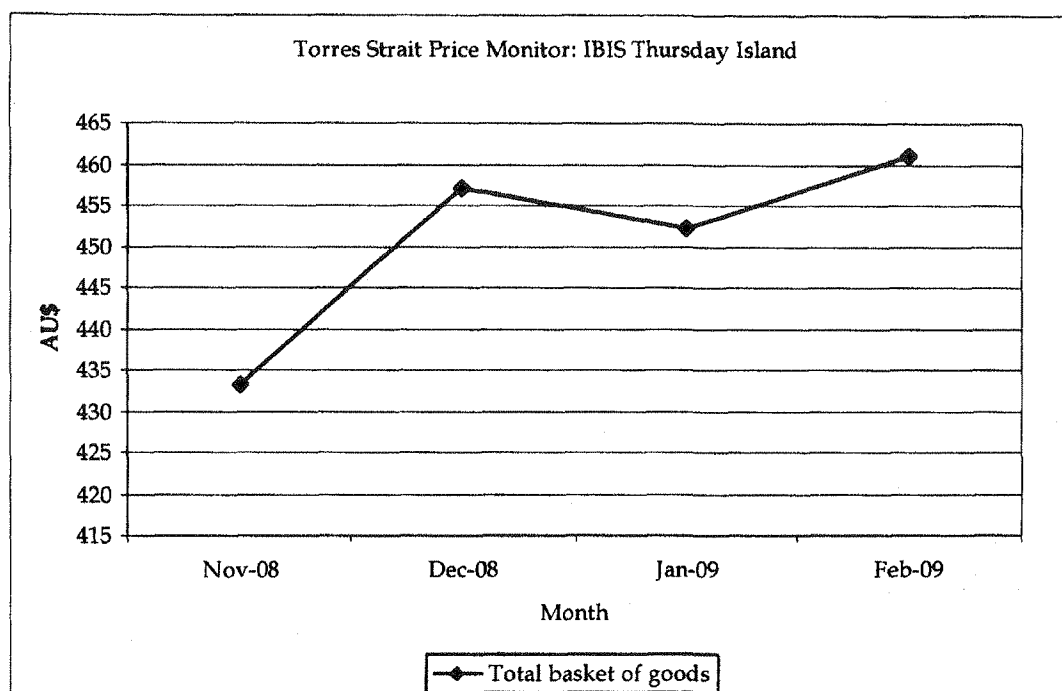
In November 2008 IBIS responded to concerns expressed about the cost of food in the Torres Strait by Mr Jim Turnour MP, Member for Leichhardt and Queensland Senator Sue Boyce. In the regional newspaper, the *Torres News*, the CEO of IBIS, Richard Bowler, agreed that the price of food in the Torres Strait was far too high for families on low incomes, and invited elected representatives to help IBIS reduce the costs associated with retailing in remote areas. He outlined the various factors contributing to prices in the region. Please refer to attached copy of the article.

TSRA believes a review of the mandate, structure and operation of IBIS should be seriously considered. Such a review would include examination of IBIS purchasing policies and whether the IBIS mandate is being met and/or is relevant to the current situation in the Torres Strait.

In late 2008 TSRA decided to commence monthly monitoring of the price of a basket of goods sold at the major supermarket operated by IBIS on Thursday Island. The items in this *Torres Strait Price Monitor* basket are a combination of items used in the Queensland *Shop Smart* and Commonwealth *PriceWatch* baskets, to enable comparison with the mainland. It also includes a few items that are particularly important and widely used in the Torres Strait.

Attached please find the *Torres Strait Price Monitor* for November 2008 - February 2009.

The chart below shows the cost of the total basket over the last four months. TSRA intends to continue to collect information on a monthly basis in order to build up a picture of cost fluctuations and provide others with the data to enable comparisons with the mainland. TSRA also intends, however, to extract data for the items common across all three baskets (*Price Monitor*, *Shop Smart* and *PriceWatch*) to produce a comparative chart. It should be noted that from month to month there were some small variations in the items making up the basket as they were not consistently available and were substituted with a like product.



TSRA notes that few or no items in the *Torres Strait Price Monitor* basket each month have been on special. Those items in the basket identified as being on special had in fact no special price, that is, the special price and the normal price on the shelf were the same. Thus, the saving to the consumer was not made clear. This could be considered misleading or false advertising.

Other stores in the region do not always price goods on their shelves, leaving the consumer uninformed and unable to compare brands until they get to the checkout.

TOR 3: The impact of these factors on the health and economic outcomes of communities

Being overweight is a national problem, as is the growing incidence of obesity. Figures generated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) on the incidence of overweight and obese Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults (over 18 years of age) compared with the Australian adult population as a whole shows that the incidence of obesity in the Torres Strait communities is fifty-five percent higher than the national average, which is a major concern (refer Table 1 below).

Torres Strait Islanders also have the highest incidence of type 2 diabetes in Australia: about one third of adults are affected.²

² Leonard D, McDermott R, O'Dea K, et al. 2002. Obesity, diabetes and associated cardiovascular risk factors among Torres Strait Islander people. *Aust NZJ Public Health* 26: 144-149. Cited in

Health issue	National population % (18 years +)³	National Indigenous % (15 years +)⁴	Torres Strait Islander Indigenous % (18 years +)⁵
Overweight	35	28	29
Obese	18	29	31

In the Torres Strait there is a high incidence of consumption of fast-foods, heavily processed and unhealthily prepared, in large portions, as well as high-sugar soft-drinks. Communities also tend to consume high glycaemic, highly refined foods of low nutritional value such as white rice, white flour, sugar, white bread etc (a popular dish is baked or fried scones/damper).

The *Medical Journal of Australia* reports on the outcomes of a diabetes study in the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Health Service District (in effect the Torres Strait region). It found that clinical care of adults with diabetes improved over the period 1999 - 2005, and more people with diabetes were correctly diagnosed, but that weight gain and high rates of glycaemia remained a challenge and were resulting in a large burden of complications, including renal failure.⁶ It observed no change in smoking habits over the period.

The study estimates that 120 new cases of diabetes will appear in the District annually. It calls for urgent action to improve nutrition, decrease smoking and increase physical activity to improve metabolic fitness in younger people.⁷

Other key comments in the study of particular relevance to this Inquiry are:

- There appear to be few successful systematic interventions (in contrast to improvements in community-level clinical care services) dealing with the causes of diabetes in the population, particularly central obesity

McDermott R, McCulloch B, Campbell S and Young D 2007. Diabetes in the Torres Strait Islands of Australia: better clinical systems but significant increase in weight and other risk conditions among adults, 1999 - 2005. *Med J Aust* 186: 505

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008. *Overweight and Obesity in Adults 2004 - 05*. Cat. No. 4719.0 Canberra: ABS

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics & Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008. *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*. Canberra: ABS & AIHW

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008. *Overweight and Obesity - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: A snapshot, 2004-05*. Cat. No. 4722.0.55.006 Canberra: ABS

⁶ McDermott R, McCulloch B, Campbell S and Young D 2007. Diabetes in the Torres Strait Islands of Australia: better clinical systems but significant increase in weight and other risk conditions among adults, 1999 - 2005. *Med J Aust* 186: 505-511

⁷ McDermott R, McCulloch B, Campbell S and Young D 2007.

(accumulation of fat around the abdomen), poor quality food and tobacco use

- People in very remote areas of Queensland pay an average of \$114 per fortnight more than people living in the cities for a very basic family food basket and have faced higher increases in food prices than the CPI, but the price of tobacco is no different from metropolitan areas⁸
- The situation demands innovative and ongoing population-level interventions which have demonstrated effectiveness and are highly cost-effective.⁹

The \$114 mentioned above comes from another *Medical Journal of Australia* study which analyses the 2004 Healthy Food Access Basket (HFAB) survey, the fourth biennial Queensland-wide survey of the costs and availability of a standard basket of basic healthy food items, and compares it with previous survey results. Additional findings of this study include:

- The cost of fruit, vegetables and legumes in the HFAB were some twenty percent higher in very remote areas compared with major cities
- The Queensland mean cost of the HFAB increased by fourteen percent between 2001 and 2004, while in very remote areas it increased by eighteen percent
- Basic healthy food items were less likely to be available in very remote and remote areas - eleven percent of HFAB food items were not available for purchase in stores in these areas
- The cost of healthy foods rose more than the cost of some less nutritious foods, making the latter relatively more affordable
- The price of unhealthy items (meat pie, cola beverage, tobacco, cigarettes) may be less affected by remoteness than the HFAB items, with one possible explanation being that less healthy products are more robust and profitable, so the extra costs associated with providing them to remote locations can be absorbed by the store.

The study concludes that:

Consumers, particularly those in very remote locations, need to pay substantially more for basic healthy foods than they did a few years ago. Higher prices are likely to be a barrier to good health among people of low socioeconomic status and other vulnerable groups.

⁸ Citing Harrison M S, Coyne T, Lee AJ, et al. 2007. The increasing cost of the basic foods required to promote health in Queensland. *Med J Aust* 186: 9-14

⁹ Citing Jacobs-van der Bruggen M, Bos G, Bemelmans WJ, et al. 2007. Lifestyle interventions are cost-effective in people with different levels of diabetes risk. *Diabetes Care* 30: 128-134

Interventions to make basic healthy food affordable and accessible to all would help reduce the high burden of chronic disease.¹⁰

Whilst the TSRA does not have a mandate to deliver health services or programmes, its focus in the health arena is to strengthen and support regional health initiatives undertaken by other agencies. A new TSRA programme of work endorsed by the TSRA Board in December 2008, to commence in July 2009, is entitled Healthy Homes. The aim of the Healthy Homes Programme will be to:

- Monitor health service delivery in the region and contribute to ensuring health service levels are equal to the national standard
- Improve the health of Indigenous people living in the region through proactive healthy living initiatives
- Increase Indigenous home ownership.

TSRA agrees with the above mentioned studies: the Torres Strait requires innovative and ongoing population-level interventions to address its chronic disease burden including interventions to improve healthy food affordability and accessibility.

We believe there is a need for health authorities, at more than just the local level, to partner with regional Councils and work actively with retailers and suppliers to offer new, healthier version of products. Appeals to corporate social responsibility should be made: IBIS and other retailers need to recognise their role in social outcomes/health outcomes, especially in view of IBIS' Constitution which requires it to operate for the betterment and advantage of communities of the Torres Strait.¹¹

We believe there is a need to 'think outside the box' with regards to addressing the poor health outcomes of Torres Strait Islanders. Thus we see merit in considering the option of direct intervention to achieve positive health outcomes. This includes pricing according to healthiness in combination with removing the financial benefit of bulk buying unhealthy goods. For example, removing discounts on larger/bulk products with detrimental impacts on health such as soft drinks, while pricing water bottles at a more favourable rate (and thus making up for the loss of revenue from soft drinks).

Gradual product substitution is also an option that could be considered. It will require retailer agreement to adopt a policy of only stocking products (not re-ordering unhealthy products as stock runs out) with medically-advised optimum low sugar content, and low fat content. For example, replacing Coke with Diet Coke or Coke Zero, replacing crisps fried in 'vegetable oil' (which includes palm oil), with varieties using 100% sunflower oil, etc. Outlets serving fried food could

¹⁰ Harrison M S, Coyne T, Lee AJ, et al. 2007. The increasing cost of the basic foods required to promote health in Queensland. *Med J Aust* 186: 9-14

¹¹ Let's talk on ways to cut high prices, IBIS', *Torres News* 19 - 25 November 2008: 1, 3

similarly be involved by replacing all their oils with 100% low-saturate vegetable oil.

Any such initiatives need to find a way to counter the increase in price often associated with better quality, healthier foods. This is a national issue.

TSRA is aware that IBIS has a 'healthy food programme' comprising a number of planned or current initiatives such as: improving fresh produce fridges and the stocking of them by IBIS staff; avoiding the advertising of sugared drinks; providing bottled water at competitive prices; installing small fridges stocked with water near tellers for the 'impulse buyer'; reducing the proportion of sugared drinks to non-sugared drinks on sale by allocating fifty percent of drink shelf space to healthy choices; recognising that fruit juice is not necessarily a healthy option given the impact on diabetes; hiring a dietician to identify the healthiest product within a range and labelling this product as such for the information of customers; and conducting cooking classes for customers using healthier options.¹²

While these represent positive initiatives by IBIS, without longitudinal, independent, scientific monitoring it will be hard to ascertain the extent of any health benefits flowing from these actions. Any impact will take some time to become evident and it is only one element of a multi-pronged programme of action that must be designed for the region.

Another issue to be explored is the size of portions. Any Information-Education-Communication campaign may be able to draw on the experience of health authorities in educating the public on a 'standard drink', as serving sizes (meal sizes) in the Torres Strait are commonly large. Avenues for getting food outlets on board to change what 'small', 'medium' and 'large' means (with commensurate changes in prices so customers do not feel they are paying more for less) could be explored.

If such ideas were to be progressed into initiatives and implemented, they could provide a possible blueprint or pilot for the rest of Australia.

TSRA is, through the LSMU, encouraging and assisting with the establishment of community and school gardens. Pilot projects are running involving four communities (see below). These will come under the umbrella of the Sustainable Horticultural Practices in the Torres Straits Project (still being negotiated), which will focus on revegetation, ornamental horticulture as well as gardens and food production.

In terms of gardens and food production, the aim of the Horticultural Practices in the Torres Strait Project is to reinvigorate traditional community gardens and encourage backyard gardens throughout the region based on an approach blending traditional and permaculture elements. Encouragement will be provided

¹² Personal communication with Richard Bowler, CEO of IBIS, 24 February 2009

to grow not only traditional foods, but other options that are appropriate to the environment, easy to grow and nutrient rich (for example, star fruit, different taros, chocolate pudding fruit, star apple...). This will provide greater variety in the local diet and improve health outcomes.

The LSMU is initially focusing on four island communities where community members have expressed a strong interest in horticulture. Nursery teams from each of the target islands recently visited Badu Island Nursery, to see the diversity of fruit trees and vegetables grown there and see what aspects could be incorporated into their own nurseries and community gardens.

The Horticultural Practices Project will also be producing comprehensive sustainable guidelines for horticulture in the Torres Strait, and will link directly with another proposed LSMU project - the Horticulture in Schools Program which will be done in partnership with TAGAI College. This program aims to establish gardens in schools where students can grow vegetables and cook them. It is also proposed to produce a recipe book for traditional foods.

Assuming community and household gardens are successful, it will take some time to spread to all Islands, and to address obesity issues. If unhealthy food options remain on sale, gardening projects may struggle to create a widespread life-style change.

Any awareness raising campaigns need to be carefully designed to maximise their impact - cognisant of the cultural opposition to being 'told what to do'. Many years of public education on the dangers of obesity and encouragement to exercise and eat a balanced diet in modest portions have failed to stem the increase in the incidence of obesity in Torres Strait communities.

Physical activity in the Torres Strait is largely associated with fishing. Other forms of exercise, for recreation and health, are engaged in by a small minority of Torres Strait Islanders. The tropical climate is not conducive to more strenuous forms of exercise, though most islands have a rugby league team and basketball and volleyball are also popular.

In the regional community consultations in late 2008 several communities identified lack of sporting and recreational facilities and activities (including structured activities) as issues of concern, along with lack of fresh food/high cost of healthy food/absence of healthy lifestyle initiatives.

Informal, non-competitive sport and physical recreation options need to be encouraged to enable those who have not been active for much of their life to commence physical activity. If such options were structured and lead/organised, and undertaken in air-conditioned venues, there may be a greater uptake. There appears greater potential for swimming to be encouraged. The feasibility and appropriateness of combined parent and infant/child fitness programmes, such as

the pioneering KidFit,¹³ which recently gained national media coverage, may be worthwhile investigating by district, regional and State health authorities.

In conclusion

There is a need for greater government action, in partnership with the private sector, to counteract cost of living issues in general and cost of food in particular; improve quality and variety of fresh produce, and work on preventative health programs. Recommended actions include:

- Subsidisation of transport and freight
- Provision of public transport to improve connectivity between the islands – to include recommencement of a regular ferry service using a vessel of optimal size and with the highest of marine safety standards
- Exploration of alternative fuels with lower economic and environmental costs
- Support for initiatives that aim to increase local production of fresh foods
- Identification of ways to improve the supply and price of fresh meat in the Torres Strait, including through subsidisation, to reduce the reliance on dugong and turtle meat
- Review of the mandate, structure and operation of the Islander Board of Industry and Service
- Stipulating and enforcing the clear pricing of all products on shelves in stores and clear differentiation of normal and special prices
- Exploration and adoption of innovative, ongoing interventions to address the region's chronic disease burden, with high level State and Commonwealth commitment and oversight, and including the private sector
- Support for informal, non-competitive sport and physical recreation options
- Support for physical recreation infrastructure and the implementation of more healthy-lifestyle initiatives and fitness programmes.

Attachments:

- 'Let's talk on ways to cut high prices, IBIS', Torres News 19 - 25 November 2008: 1, 3
- Torres Strait Price Monitor for November 2008 – February 2009.

¹³ See: <http://www.kidfit.com.au/>;

<http://www.essentialbaby.com.au/parenting/toddler/tackling-childhood-obesity--get-mum-fit-too-20090212-85i7.html?page=-1>;

<http://www.theage.com.au/news/lifeandstyle/wellbeing/tackling-childhood-obesity-get-mum-fit-too/2009/02/06/1233423502920.html>

Let's talk on ways to cut high prices, IBIS

Sunday, 23 November 2008

The CEO of IBIS Richard Bowler has called on the elected representatives of the community to work with IBIS to find ways to reduce the cost of food in the region.

"The retail price of food in the Torres Strait is a reflection of the high cost of doing business in the area," Mr Bowler told the Torres News.

"IBIS welcomes the interest from (Member for Leichhardt) Mr (Jim) Turnour in the cost of food in the Torres Strait."

Mr Bowler was replying to surveys conducted by Mr Turnour and Senator Sue Boyce published recently which showed the cost of food in the Torres Strait to be much higher than in Cairns.

"Despite the fact that IBIS disputes the accuracy of the survey, it does concede that the prices of groceries in the Torres Strait are far too high for the people on low incomes and large families.

"I do agree that the price of food in the Torres Strait is far too high for families on low incomes and invite the elected representatives who have voiced their interest in this issue to help us reduce the costs associated with retailing in remote areas.

"I would like to meet with the elected representatives to discuss ways and means to reduce the cost of retailing in remote areas.

"For many years IBIS operated in an environment of financial instability and this meant IBIS did not have the money necessary to maintain its stores. It took five years of hard work for IBIS to make its first profit last year.

"IBIS has improved its financial position to where it can now use the profit it is generating to make much-needed maintenance, repairs, upgrades and refurbishments to its stores. Any profit that is generated by IBIS is being reinvested into the business to correct this previous neglect.

"We welcome the interest shown by Mr Turnour in the delivery of essential retail services in the Torres Strait."

Mr Bowler said: "There is no doubt that generally the prices in Cairns are cheaper than they are in the Torres Strait.

"A significant amount of this difference is due to the cost of freighting the goods the 1000km from Cairns by ship to Horn Island and the additional charges of shipping goods up to a further 200km by barge to the Outer Islands.

"Additionally the stores in Cairns service a population of over 120,000 people whereas the biggest IBIS store on Thursday Island, serves a population of less than 3000 people and this makes the cost of providing the service much higher in comparison.

"In addition the cost of maintaining refrigeration and fuel systems are many times what retailers in major regional areas would have to pay. As an indication the cost of repairing one of the fuel pumps at one of the outer island stores earlier this year was close to \$18,000.

"This is more than any profit that would come from selling fuel from that site for several of years."

Mr Bowler says IBIS regularly monitors the difference in prices between the IBIS stores and the stores in Cairns and other retailers in the Torres Strait.

"The results of our surveys are significantly different to the results than those reported, both in dry goods and Fruit and Vegetables as can be seen below.

"Queensland Health has asked IBIS to work with them on strategies to improve the health of the community of the Torres Strait. Queensland Health has informed IBIS that large proportion of the health issues of the community are dietary related.

"As part of our commitment to improving the health of the community IBIS took the stand that it would ensure that it made a range of healthy food available to the communities it serves at very low prices.

"As part of this Policy, IBIS ensures that its customers are provided with an ongoing supply of cheap healthy food choices, often selling fresh fruit and vegetable in all its stores at prices well below the major supermarkets in Cairns - set

out below are price comparisons between the price of IBIS fruit and vegetables and stores in Cairns for the specials advertised in the Torres News for 27 October to 2 November.

Mr Bowler said: "We see making healthy food available at affordable prices as an investment in the well-being and future of the people we serve and have been serving for over 100 years. We pro-actively demonstrate this commitment through our Pricing Policy – it costs IBIS 95c per kilogram to freight fresh fruit and vegetables to the Outer Oslands of the Torres Strait, as can be seen from the above prices IBIS is losing money on every kilogram of those products sold.

"IBIS is motivated to do everything in its power to help improve the health outcomes of the people of the Torres Strait. I believe our Healthy Food Program and the Pricing Policy work hand in hand to achieve real successes in this area."

"IBIS runs specials on its fresh fruit and vegetable and grocery range weekly – but only healthy food is on special.

"To ensure that the IBIS Board has a good understanding of the issues in the Torres Strait the Government appoints a number of local representatives to the Board. These local representatives along with the 150 IBIS staff provide ongoing feedback to IBIS Management to ensure that it has a good understanding of the issues in the Community.