



Torres Strait Futures Workshop Summary

The following outcomes were developed by participants at the National Environmental Research Program's 'Torres Strait Futures' workshop held on 22 – 23 October, 2012 in Cairns. The 20 participants represented Australian, Queensland and Local Government stakeholders, NGOs and private enterprises that have responsibilities in the Torres Strait.

A vision for the future

- ≈ Torres Strait Islanders will enjoy a good standard of living in culturally vibrant communities with a strong sense of identity and core values.
- ≈ Torres Strait Islanders will have healthy communities with good access to education and livelihood opportunities, low crime rates, strong traditional culture and knowledge, sustainable natural resources, self-determination and ways of addressing the rising cost of living.
- ≈ Torres Strait Islanders will be able to cultivate the core values which underpin their sense of place and culture: respect, kinship, kindness, sharing and loyalty.

A diverging future world

Drivers of change will have a strong influence on how the future of the Torres Strait plays out. Four scenarios were explored that considered different combinations of local drivers (e.g. population, culture, community cohesion, natural resource condition) and global drivers (e.g. economic conditions including cost of goods and services, climate change, increasing resource demand in Asia and associated development in adjacent PNG, technological advances):

- ≈ *Northern Exposure* was the 'Business as Usual' scenario, with declining local and global conditions. This results in a Torres Strait with high emigration, loss of culture, significant environmental degradation and spreading disease, limited opportunities to provide a good standard of living for Islanders and cross-border security and pollution risks from PNG and Indonesia.
- ≈ *Doug's World* was an intermediate scenario, with strong local conditions but negative global drivers. This results in a good standard of living for Torres Strait communities that include self-sufficiency, healthy natural resources, livelihood diversity and a strong culture capable of adapting to global change.
- ≈ *Hope Island* was the 'Best Case' scenario, and was closest to the stakeholders' desired vision, with strong local and more benign global conditions. This results in a community with economic, cultural, social, environmental and political stability working towards self-determination and self-sufficiency.
- ≈ *Torres Strait Territory* was an intermediate scenario, with declining local conditions but more benign global conditions. This results in a Torres Strait that builds self-determination and capitalises on global opportunities, and uses technological advances to re-link cultural networks and counter high emigration to mainland Australia.

Local drivers were important for determining the quality of life, sustainability and vitality of Torres Strait communities that best represented the stakeholders' vision for the future. Although global drivers (if positive) could temper local issues such as population declines and some community disintegration, they could not substitute for community culture and core values. Key thresholds which may be passed resulting in a fundamental change in the identity of the Torres Strait included: high pollution levels from PNG rivers causing seagrass dieback, breakdowns in international agreements, and peak oil.

Pathways to a desirable future

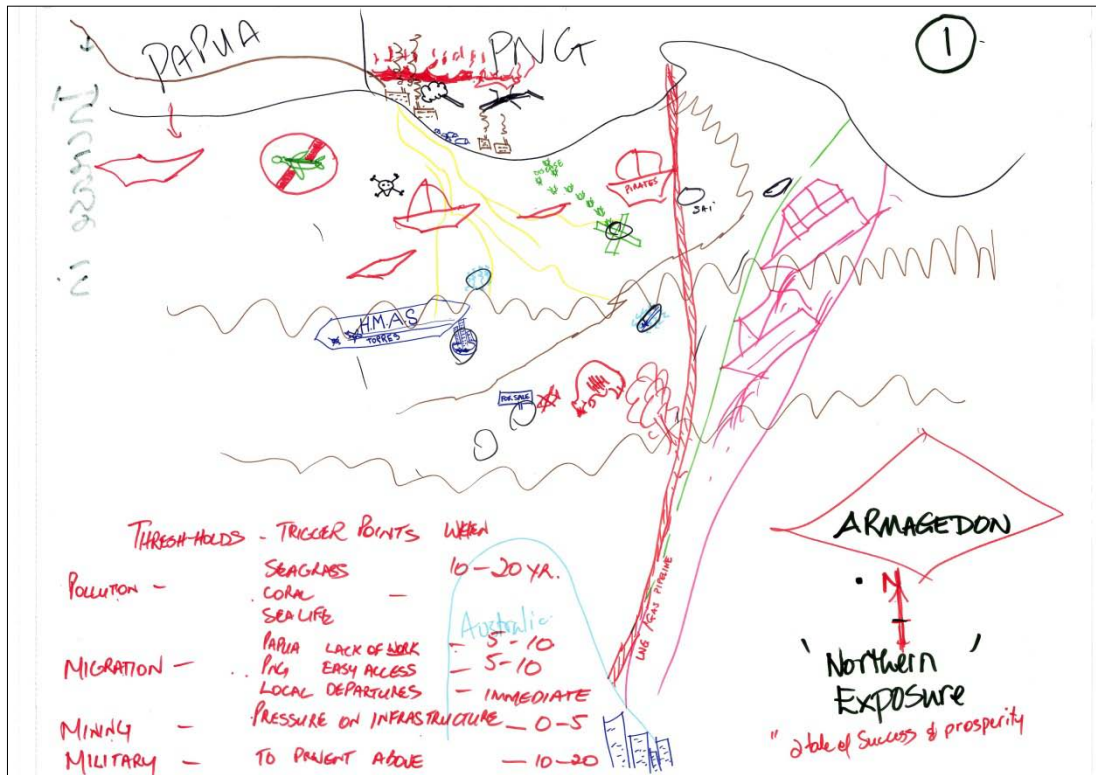
Decisions made now will influence how the Torres Strait looks in the future, and which pathway the community takes as both local and global drivers exert influence. 'No regrets' adaptations that will enable Torres Strait communities to reach their desirable future in spite of uncertainty need to be developed with communities and community groups to ensure on-ground implementation of actions is successful. Adaptation strategies are likely to consider maximising access to important ecosystem goods and services, and minimising impacts on these.



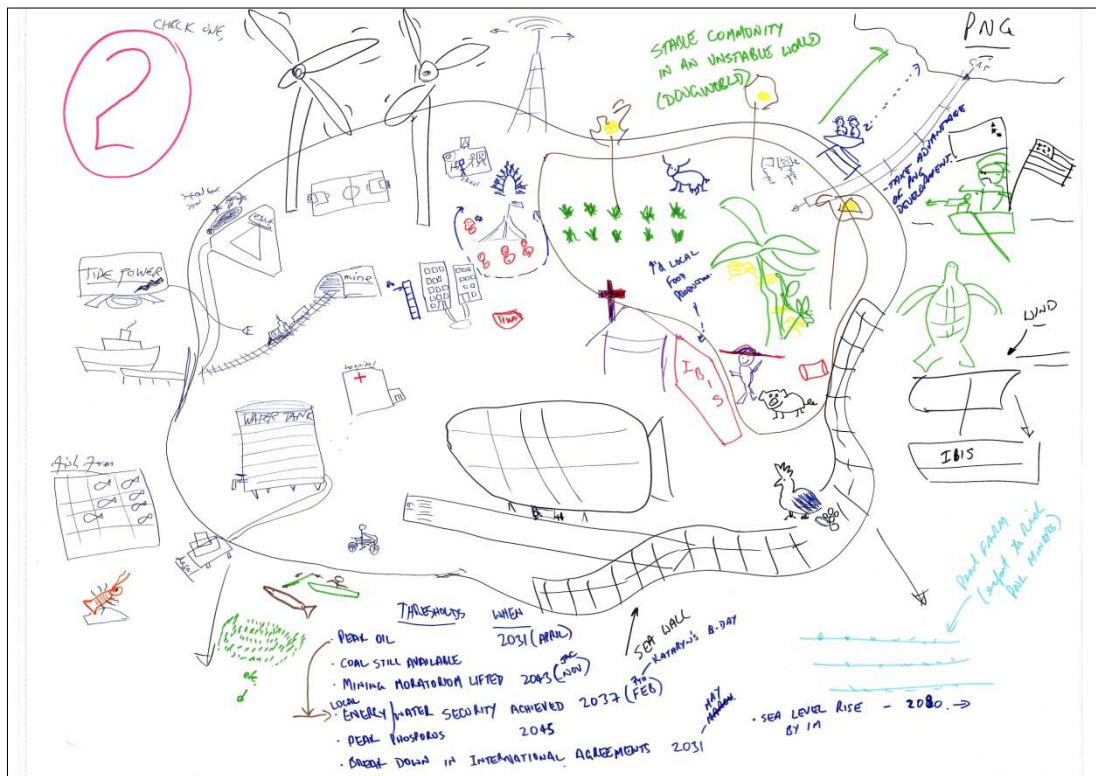
Workshop participants and CSIRO team

L – R: Tim Skewes, Johanna Johnson, Yiheyis Maru, Erin Bohensky, Murray Korff, James Butler, John McDougall, Philippa Bauer, Julie Colman, Ian Copeland, Garrick Hitchcock, Ian Bell, Sara Busilacchi, Robert Zigterman, Alifereti Tawake

Imagining the future



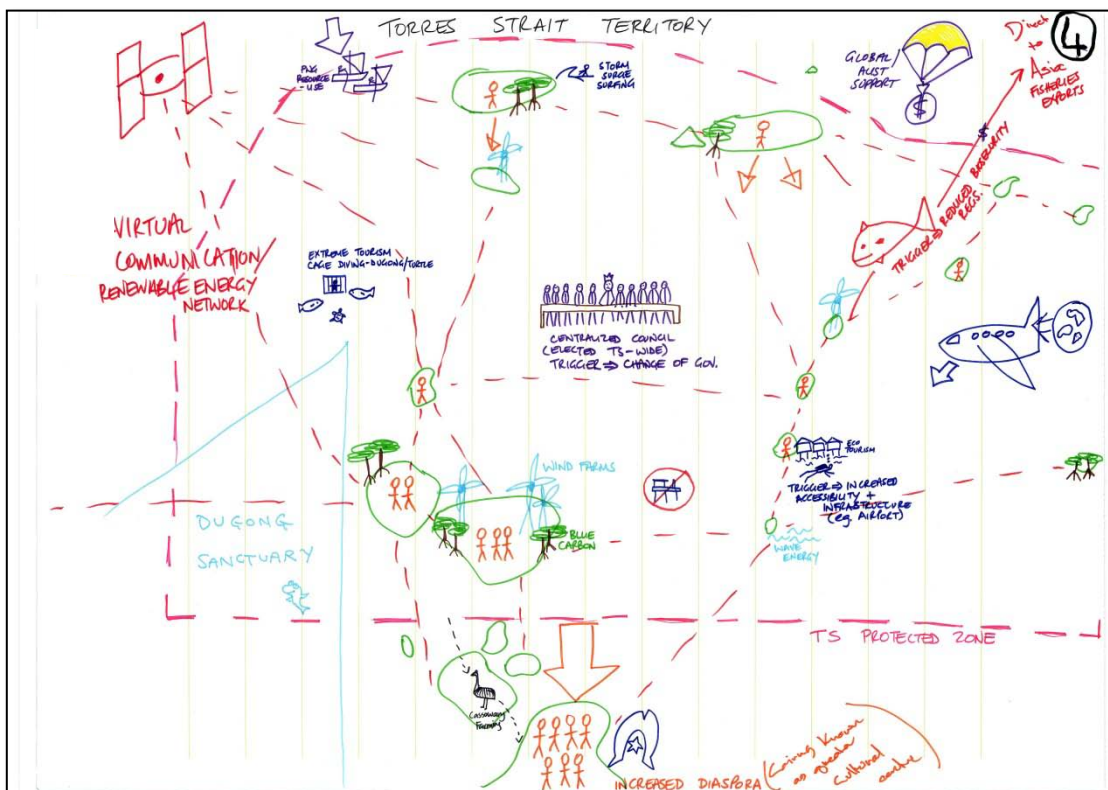
Northern Exposure ('Worst Case Scenario')



Doug's World



Hope Island ('Best Case' scenario)



Torres Strait Territory