

Torres Strait Treaty, 1978

The Torres Strait Treaty is an agreement between Australia and Papua New Guinea which describes the boundaries between the two countries and how the sea areas may be used. In defining the two main boundaries – the Seabed Jurisdiction Line and the Fisheries Jurisdiction Line – as well as a 'protected zone', the Treaty takes account of traditional activities (including sea and land use, trade, ceremonies and social gatherings) of the indigenous residents of the Torres Strait area.

Negotiation of the Treaty involved lengthy discussions between the national governments of Australia and Papua New Guinea, the Queensland state government and Torres Strait Island representatives. The Treaty was signed at Papua New Guinea (PNG) House in Sydney on 18 December 1978, but did not come into effect until February 1985. Further information about the Torres Strait Treaty is available from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Records about the Torres Strait Treaty

The National Archives holds records of a number of the Australian Government agencies that helped develop and negotiate the Torres Strait Treaty, including the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Attorney-General's Department, and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The National Archives also holds records of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, which conducted two inquiries into aspects of the Treaty during the late 1970s. Relevant material from the personal records collections of Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser and Attorney-General's Department official John Greenwell has also been identified. A selection of our holdings is listed below.

Department of Foreign Affairs (CA 1382)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Working papers of the negotiations for the Torres Strait Treaty</u>	1973–78	A10580
<u>Records of Treaty and negotiations</u>	1976–78	A1838, 3080/18/1/3/23 PART 1
<u>Records of Treaty and negotiations</u>	1976–78	A1838, 3080/18/1/3/23 PART 2
<u>Records of Treaty and negotiations</u>	1976–78	A1838, 3080/18/1/3/23 PART 3
<u>Torres Strait Treaty</u>	1977–79	A1838, 3080/18/1/3/15 PART 1

<u>Torres Strait Treaty</u>	1977–79	A1838, 3080/18/1/3/15 PART 2
<u>Torres Strait Treaty</u>	1977–79	A1838, 3080/18/1/3/15 PART 3
<u>Torres Strait Treaty</u>	1977–79	A1838, 3080/18/1/3/15 PART 4
<u>Torres Strait Treaty</u>	1977–79	A1838, 3080/18/1/3/15 PART 5
<u>Torres Strait Treaty</u>	1977–79	A1838, 3080/18/1/3/15 PART 6
<u>Torres Strait Treaty</u>	1977–79	A1838, 3080/18/1/3/15 PART 7
<u>Torres Strait Treaty</u>	1977–79	A1838, 3080/18/1/3/15 ANNEX
<u>Torres Strait Treaty – implementing legislation</u>	1978–79	A1838, 3080/18/1/3/16 PART 1
<u>Torres Strait Treaty – implementing legislation</u>	1978–79	A1838, 3080/18/1/3/16 PART 2
<u>Torres Strait Treaty – arrangements for signing ceremony</u>	1958 - 1987	A1838, 3080/18/1/3/19 PART 1
<u>Torres Strait Treaty – legal challenge to the Treaty</u>	1978–80	A1838, 3080/18/1/3/21 PART 1
<u>Brief for Australian delegation to official discussions with Papua New Guinea on the Torres Strait Treaty</u>	1978	A2539, B1978/26
<u>Brief for Minister for Foreign Affairs for discussions with Queensland Ministers and Torres Strait leaders on Torres Strait Treaty</u>	1978	A2539, B1978/27

Australian Customs Service, Central Office (CA 4416)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Torres Strait Treaty – passenger concessions section interests</u>	1976–86	A425, 1979/4060

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (CA 1401)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Torres Strait Agreement – Treaty signing ceremony and Secretary's luncheon – invitation lists</u>	1978	A463, 1978/2694

Cabinet Office (CA 1472)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Torres Strait – Australian position for resumed treaty negotiations with Papua New Guinea</u>	1978	A12909, 2078
<u>Treaty between the independent state of Papua New Guinea and Australia concerning sovereignty and maritime boundaries in the area between the two countries including the area known as Torres Strait and related matters</u>	1978	A12909, 2737

Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs [I] (CA 1955)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Torres Strait Treaty negotiations</u>	1978–85	A446, 1979/95006

Joint Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence (CA 2491)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Inquiry into Torres Strait boundary	1976–77	A12882
Inquiry into Torres Strait Treaty	1977–83	A12745

Rt Hon John Malcolm Fraser (CP 51)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
Torres Strait Treaty	1975–79	M1268, 231
Torres Strait Treaty – 18 December 1978 – speech notes	1978	M1263, 753

John Henry Greenwell (CP 1000)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
Torres Strait Treaty	1973–81	M4835, 36
Torres Strait – Australia–Papua New Guinea border	1974–78	M4835, 231

Photographic records

The National Archives also holds several photographs of the Torres Strait Treaty signing ceremony taken by the Australian Information Service, which may be viewed on [PhotoSearch](#). Conduct searches using either the series and item number details provided below or the keyword phrase 'torres strait agreement'.

Australian Information Service (CA 1578)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
Papua New Guinea – Signing of Torres Strait Islands Agreement, PNG House, Sydney	1978	A6180, 8/1/79/24
Papua New Guinea – Signing of Torres Strait Islands Agreement, PNG House, Sydney	1978	A6180, 8/1/79/25
Papua New Guinea – Signing of Torres Strait Islands Agreement, PNG House, Sydney	1978	A6180, 8/1/79/26
Papua New Guinea – Signing of Torres Strait Islands Agreement, PNG House, Sydney	1978	A6180, 8/1/79/27
Papua New Guinea – Signing of Torres Strait Islands Agreement, PNG House, Sydney	1978	A6180, 8/1/79/28

How to find more information

[Search the collection](#) to identify further records items held in the Archives on the Torres Strait Treaty. Try keyword phrases such as: 'torres strait treaty' or 'torres strait agreement'.