



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL CAPITAL
AND EXTERNAL TERRITORIES

Reference: Norfolk Island governance

WEDNESDAY, 16 JULY 2003

NORFOLK ISLAND

BY AUTHORITY OF THE PARLIAMENT

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JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AND EXTERNAL TERRITORIES

Wednesday, 16 July 2003

Members: Senator Lightfoot (*Chair*), Senators Crossin, Hogg, Lundy, Scullion and Stott Despoja and Mr Causley, Ms Ellis, Mr Johnson, Mr Neville, Mr Snowdon and Mr Cameron Thompson

Senators and members in attendance: Senators Hogg and Lightfoot and Mr Neville and Mr Cameron Thomson

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Measures to improve the operations and organisation of the Territory Ministry and Legislature on Norfolk Island, with particular emphasis on the need for a financially sustainable and accountable system of representative self-government in the Territory.

The inquiry should consider the following:

- a) direct elections for the position of Chief Minister; and
- b) fixed terms of government

These matters should be considered in the context of the financial sustainability of self-government arrangements on Norfolk Island, with particular consideration of:

- a) the findings of the Commonwealth Grants Commission documented in its 1997 report on Norfolk Island on the Territory's capacity to administer and fund obligations associated with:
 - current and future government functions and responsibilities;
 - the Island's current and foreseeable infrastructure requirements;
 - the provision of government services on Norfolk Island at an appropriate level;
 - subsequent government and parliamentary reports relevant to the above; and
 - the role of the Commonwealth and its responsibilities for Norfolk Island as part of remote and regional Australia.

WITNESSES

BUFFETT, Miss Alice Inez (Private capacity) 1

Committee met at 10.59 a.m.**BUFFETT, Miss Alice Inez (Private capacity)**

Senator HOGG—We are now on the public record. A concern that has been expressed to the committee is that fear and intimidation is felt by a number of people on the island because of their activities on the island in opposing, maybe, the views of the Legislative Assembly or others. Is that a fair comment that has been made to the inquiry? Is there an environment of fear and apprehension on the part of the people about appearing before a committee such as this? Can you recommend anything the committee might do to see that good governance applies and people can express their freely held views in society?

Miss Buffett—There is the existence of fear and apprehension amongst quite a few people who would like to submit to the joint standing committee visiting and even to the joint standing committee within the house of the Norfolk Island legislature but who are reticent to do so and will not do so—so they are more than reticent—in fear of reprisal. English is my second language—I am losing myself for words. I cannot think straight off, as I have not given it any considered thought, as to how this might be resolved, because it is a tall order. It is a small island, and people see people every day. But it does exist.

Senator HOGG—Could I put to you—and I am sorry about this, Chair—that it might assist if this committee recommended in its report that good governance principles be put in place for Norfolk Island, encompassing freedom of information legislation. I am not talking about just contemplating legislation but actively putting it in place, with freedom of information, ombudsmen, and access to independent auditors who would do performance audits on the various functions of the Legislative Assembly government here. Would that assist to open up the better governance of this place and take away some of the fears that people might have?

Miss Buffett—Yes, I think that would help to a certain extent. But there is this caution that the appointment of ombudsmen and such, and others, would need to be not from within this little place.

Senator HOGG—You would need someone external to it.

Miss Buffett—Yes.

Senator HOGG—And that would also apply in the case of a magistrate's appointment.

Miss Buffett—Yes.

CHAIR—There being no further questions, Miss Buffett, I thank you on behalf of the committee. It is always a delight to see you and hear you before the committee when we are on the island. If there are any matters on which we might need additional information, the secretary will write to you. On behalf of the committee, thank you again for appearing before us today.

Miss Buffett—Thank you, Chair.

Committee adjourned at 11.04 a.m.
