



## **Background to the proposal**

### **Existing freight and passenger facilities**

- 1.1 Historically, freight handling and passenger transfer on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands have been characterised by many logistical and environmental problems.
- 1.2 The existing freight handling facilities on West Island consist of a beach landing area on the north-eastern side of West Island. Unloading directly onto the beach involves the use of a portable steel barge ramp which is capable of handling a trailer loaded with a single container.
- 1.3 An existing passenger jetty located at the north-eastern end of West Island is in a very exposed position, which results in unsafe passenger transfers during high wind and heavy swell conditions. This makes it unsuitable for development as a major freight and passenger facility.
- 1.4 The Department of Transport and Regional Services (DoTRS) considers that the jetty is close to the end of its economic life and will require a major upgrade if it is to be used in the future.

### **Current procedures for unloading freight**

- 1.5 Anchorage for container ships is available at Blue Holes, located west of Direction Island. Here the container ship off-loads 10-15 twenty foot containers onto the *Jasa Cocos* dumb barge (not self-propelled) for transport to Home Island.

- 1.6 Notwithstanding that West Island-bound containers are more numerous, direct transfer by the *Jasa Cocos* to West Island is not possible due to the lack of suitable freight facilities. A smaller barge, the *Biar Berjaya*, is used to convey freight from Home Island to West Island.
- 1.7 The *Biar Berjaya* barge, however, is capable of carrying only 17 tonnes and therefore containers are required to be partially unloaded on Home Island to reduce container loads. Containers are then transported one at a time over a one to two week period from the Home Island Wharf across the eight kilometre lagoon to the beach landing area at the north-eastern side of West Island.
- 1.8 As the barge pulls up to the beach landing, it lowers its front ramp onto the portable steel ramp, which is pushed into position at the shoreline by the bulldozer at the beginning of each freight handling cycle. The Island bulldozer reverses up the ramp, hitches to the container trailer on the barge and drags the container down the ramp, up the beach and along a track to a position where the container is loaded onto the sidelifter. The sidelifter transports it to the Light Industrial Area along Sydney Highway for destuffing and distribution.
- 1.9 Currently, two chartered container ships visit the Islands on an approximate four to six week cycle.

### **Current passenger facilities**

- 1.10 A free passenger ferry service is operated between the Home Island Wharf and the West Island Jetty and is provided by the *Biar Persatuan* and *RJ Hawke* vessels.
- 1.11 The inter-island transit time for both ferries is approximately 30 minutes. Moveable gangways are provided at both berths to facilitate passenger boarding under different tidal conditions.
- 1.12 Mr Alan O'Grady, Manager, Cocos Islands Cooperative Society, advised that the ferry services are run by the Cooperative under a contract with the Department of Administration. It is currently a two year contract with a two-year renewal.<sup>1</sup>

### **Fuel Transport**

- 1.13 A small fuel tanker currently uses the Shell Buoys which are located two kilometres east north east of the West Island Jetty for anchorage. The three

<sup>1</sup> Evidence, p. 30.

mooring buoys are owned, operated and maintained by the Shell Oil Company. The vessel is secured to the three mooring buoys and a submarine fuel line transfers fuel to tanks at the north end of West Island.

- 1.14 Currently, one fuel tanker visits the Cocos (Keeling) Islands approximately every six months.

## Proposed new facilities and procedures

- 1.15 The preferred solution proposed by DoTRS to the problems currently encountered in both freight handling and passenger transfer on Cocos (Keeling) Islands is to construct an Offshore Island, approximately 200 metres from the shoreline at Rumah Baru on the eastern side of West Island, which would be connected to the shore by an access bridge. The island would be linked to deeper water in the lagoon by a dredged channel of approximately 400 metres in length.<sup>2</sup>
- 1.16 Under this proposal the process of freight and passenger movement would involve the following procedures:
- freight containers would be unloaded from the supply ship at Blue Holes onto the *Jasa Cocos* dumb barge and towed directly to the Offshore Island at West Island;
  - the containers would be unloaded and transported around West Island by a new sidelifter and prime mover truck without the requirement for containers to be de-stuffed to reduce their weight due to stability limitations of the *Biar Berjaya* barge;
  - freight destined for Home Island would be loaded onto the existing container trailers and ferried across the lagoon on the *Biar Berjaya* barge. These will be weight limited due to restrictions on the capacity of the *Biar Berjaya*;
  - passengers would be generally transported to and from the Offshore Island by bus, although pedestrian traffic would be allowed along a designated footpath. Ferries would berth at the Offshore Island to transfer passengers; and

- passengers may also be transported to and from the Offshore Island by private vehicle making use of a short term carpark facility for transferring passengers and supplies.<sup>3</sup>
- 1.17 There are no plans to alter the procedures for transferring fuel from the fuel tanker to the fuel tanks at West Island.
- 1.18 DoTRS believes that the proposed facilities will meet the current and long term needs of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. According to DoTRS:
- ... they will improve the safety, efficiency and reliability of freight and passenger facilities on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and provide facilities commensurate with the Cocos (Keeling) Islands' infrastructure, remoteness and cyclonic locality.<sup>4</sup>

## Conduct of the Inquiry

- 1.19 On 5 April 2001 the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration moved in the House of Representatives in accordance with the provisions of the *Public Works Committee Act 1969* that the Parliamentary Committee on Public Works consider and report on a proposal for freight and passenger facilities at Rumah Baru, West Island Cocos (Keeling) Islands.
- 1.20 The motion presented to the House of Representatives indicated that the estimated cost of the proposed facilities is \$14 million, with indicative costs for stage one of \$10.5 million and for stage two of \$3.5 million.
- 1.21 The Committee advertised the Inquiry in the *West Australian* on Saturday 14 April 2001. Advertisements were also placed in *The Islander* and the *Territories Tattler* which are circulated within the Indian Ocean Territories.
- 1.22 The Committee sought submissions from organisations, peak bodies and individuals who may have had an interest in the proposed development. The Committee also wrote to Senators and the Federal Member representing the Indian Ocean Territories and to the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Shire Council advising them of the Inquiry.
- 1.23 The Committee held a public hearing on West Island on Tuesday 10 July 2001. The Committee invited oral submissions from people attending the

3 Submissions, p. 22.

4 Submissions, p. 4.

hearing. Several private citizens and representatives of organisations based in the Islands accepted the invitation.

- 1.24 The Committee commends DoTRS and Gutteridge Haskins and Davey Pty Ltd (GHD) for the high quality, comprehensive and professional presentation on the proposed development. A visual presentation greatly assists the Committee to evaluate the concept. The presentation served not only to inform the Committee of specific details of the project but also the Island community present at the public hearing.
- 1.25 The Committee appreciated the efforts of the Administrator and his staff in arranging an inspection of existing facilities at both Home Island and West Island. In particular, the opportunity to observe the current procedures for unloading the containers at Home Island, loading and transferring freight to West Island on the *Biar Berjaya* and offloading it at the ramp at West Island proved invaluable to the Committee's appreciation of the need for the proposed new facilities.

## Structure of the Report

- 1.26 Chapter 1 provides a background to the project and outlines the conduct of the Committee's Inquiry. Chapter 2 addresses the need for the proposed work and Chapter 3 provides details of the proposed development. Issues arising from the Committee's Inquiry are set out in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 contains general comments, conclusions and recommendations.