



# PARLIAMENT of AUSTRALIA

## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories**

Inquiry into the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean Territories

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Issue date: 11 September 2017

## **The strategic importance of Australia's Indian Ocean Territories**

Strengthening Australia's strategic commitment to its Indian Ocean Territories whilst supporting the economic and social wellbeing of local communities was the key focus of a report released today by the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories.

The Committee's inquiry examined the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean Territories, located off Australia's northwest coast.

Committee Chair, Mr Ben Morton MP, said, "The inquiry canvassed the changing regional security environment and security contingencies in the Indian Ocean region—home to growing economies and an important trade route for Australia. The region is witnessing growing competition among growing powers, and these rapidly expanding interests in the region require a deeper understanding of this dynamic strategic environment."

The Committee recommended that the Australian Government support the development of both defence and multi-purpose infrastructure in the region and strengthen Australia's multilateral engagement with its Indo-Pacific partners. The Committee also recommended an inquiry at least every five years that considers the Indian Ocean Territories and Australia's engagement with the Indian Ocean region more broadly.

Mr Morton said that there was an underlying need for the Australian Government to engage more actively with local communities on Christmas Island and in the Cocos Islands.

As part of the inquiry, the Committee had the opportunity to meet with and hear from local residents who live and work in the communities on Christmas Island and in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

In highlighting the Committee's recent visit to the Indian Ocean Territories, Mr Morton noted, "It was clear that the local communities are interested in contributing to the decision-making process regarding the Australian Government's activities on the Islands". This, he said, was one of the themes of the Committee's report.

Mr Morton was particularly appreciative of the contribution to the inquiry by local communities, and noted that "the Committee is immensely grateful to the communities on Christmas Island and in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands for their warm welcome, openness and constructive dialogue during our visit."



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The Committee's report and further details about the inquiry—including submissions, terms of reference, and the public hearing transcripts—can be obtained from the Committee's website [here](#).

**For media comment:**

Mr Ben Morton MP (Tangney, WA), Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories, on (08) 9354 9633 (electorate office).

**For further information:**

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