

In response to the Inquiry into the Christmas Island Boat Tragedy, I would like to add my own late submission. Thank you for considering it.

I have attached a template for a lino print that I am currently working on producing. It depicts my own interpretation of the emotional impact that the boat tragedy has had on various people. Like any work of art, it is the viewers experience that is relevant. I have worried that I would be touching a very raw nerve if I put this into an exhibition. I have decided not to hold back though. I think art is an important avenue for expressing emotion.

There are many layers of impact around the boat tragedy. One that I think is important, but easy to miss, is the spiritual impact on Christmas Island. The Chinese community are a large part of the island, and have significant beliefs about the circumstances in which people die, the state of their spirits, and how this impacts on the living. When people die in difficult circumstances on the island, their spirits become trapped here - especially due to the isolation of the island. There are old stories of ghost sightings and there are places that many Chinese avoid visiting. If they go, it will not be alone. After the boat tragedy, the bodies of the deceased remained unburied on the island for over a month. During that time, the island experienced unusually persistent rain and swell conditions. Many in the Chinese community believed that this was happening because the spirits were unhappy that their bodies had not been buried. On the day that the Administrator signed the Coroner's report releasing the bodies, the sun came out and shone for the first time. Many, who do not hold much store in spiritual matters will find it easy to dismiss this as coincidence, but it sent chills through myself.

Tourism is a struggling and fledgling industry on this island. It has struggled for various reasons - flight difficulties a couple years ago being one. Right now, it feels like tourism is going through it's greatest struggle due to media coverage of Asylum Seeker incidents. Two days after the Asylum Boat foundered on rocks, the cruise ship which was due to stop at the island a week later, said they would not be stopping at Christmas Island this time, due to delays in their schedule. No one believes this was the real reason. Weather conditions probably would have prevented a successful stop, but there is still the inference that they didn't want to come so soon after the tragedy.

Many businesses on the island have benefitted from the presence of the Detention Centre. However, they are not all recognising the importance of creating an alternative economy for the day when they can no longer rely on dollars coming in from the processing of Asylum Seekers. I am concerned that the heavy reliance on Detention dollars, and the ongoing damage to our tourism product, will result in yet another boom-bust.

Island Explorer Holidays is currently contemplating the closure of their Christmas Island office - they are the only business on island that runs tours. Currently, no Travel Agency on the mainland wants to send any of their clients to our island.

Thanks