

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories Inquiry into local governance on Norfolk Island

From Sue Pearson

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Inquiry into equitable revenue earning for the Norfolk Island regional Council and operation and governance of local government.

The terms of reference of this inquiry are based around the structure Norfolk Island Regional Council which was introduced following the dissolving of the Norfolk Island Legislative Assembly.

In addressing the inquiry, the Joint Standing Committee must acknowledge the following:

- The very legality if the current governance structure is questionable and there are 2 pending petitions/cases regarding Norfolk Islands governance at the United Nations that are likely to result in self-determination for the island. Australia should uphold the United Nations covenants it has signed.
- Norfolk Island is not geographically connected to Australia, is not constitutionally an integral part of the Commonwealth of Australia.
- Norfolk Islanders (Pitcairn Descendants) are a distinct ethnic group whose homeland is Norfolk Island, and who are the first people as a whole people to occupy this Norfolk Island continuously. Norfolk Islanders have cultural practices around land use and land ownership on Norfolk Island.
- It is ethically and morally wrong to colonize a people in their own homeland.
- The founding culture, environment, remoteness, size and economy all make Norfolk Island a place and society with many different motivations and requirements to any Australian place/community. The governance and laws should reflect this.
- The governance of Norfolk Island should benefit and be appropriate for Norfolk Island, its people and future generations of its people and not motivated by anything else. Numerous submissions, petitions and referendums over the past 100 years clearly indicate the will of Norfolk Island People to determine their own future.

The current revenue earning for NIRC through land rates is outrageously unfair, unsustainable, and completely disregards Norfolk Islanders cultural practices around land use and ownership. It is an unfair burden placed upon locals land owners and businesses. If land rates and waste management fees continue in current form it will lead to sale of family more lands and the need for every block of land to become a dwelling or income earning which will be environmentally unsustainable. A return to a Norfolk Island GST would be a much more equitable revenue earning system.

The imposition Norfolk Island Regional Council and its administrator in replacement of a Norfolk Island Government does clearly not work for this place for many reasons.

It is colonization.

It is undemocratic.

There are huge amounts of money wasted on wages, expenses and items, unnecessary, unwanted and often extremely impractical.

Many decisions are made by public servants and politicians who don't live on the island permanently, with no vested interest in the long-term wellbeing of the island, no accountability to the people and who have no idea about the practicalities and long-term consequences of many of those decisions. Changes introduced in the last few years have had detrimental effects to health services, local food production, shipping, natural environment to name just a few.

Self-Government needs to be returned as soon as possible so that the Norfolk Island can be governed by its own people in a practical and appropriate manner for the holistic health and sustainability of the island and its people into the future.