



Christmas Island Women's Association

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Website: [Http:// www.ciwa.org.cx](http://www.ciwa.org.cx)

TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL CAPITAL AND EXTERNAL TERRITORIES

The Christmas Island Women's Association's submission

1 Regarding the role of the administrator and capacity (and appropriateness) of the Administrator taking on a stronger decision-making role.

- The CIWA wishes to ask the government to review if, in fact, there is a real need for any administrator role on C.I.

Based on the fact, that the administrator has *not* been elected by the local community to represent the community, CIWA believe, that the role of the administrator and capacity of the Administrator taking on a stronger decision-making role would not be appropriate.

The appointed representatives usually do not represent the views, interests and needs of the community.

However, there has been *one* Administrator, the Honourable Mr Jon Stanhope, who has been the first Administrator in the past 40 years, who did take an active interest in Islanders' welfare and lack of equality as he genuinely supported the CIWA's aims and objectives.

2 Existing consultation mechanisms undertaken by government representatives, including the IOT Regional Development organisation; and best practice for similar communities' engagement with Australia and State government.

- More effective ways of communication between the government and the community must be explored in order to ensure, that Christmas Island, and it's the social organisations are not continuously disadvantaged.
- Community information must be translated into three languages, e.g. English, Mandarin, and Malay. It is necessary that the community in all its diversity is informed, so that communication is both ways and supported at every level.



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- Communication must be channelled through the various organisations of Christmas Island including the Community Consultative Committee (CCC).
- The community has no direct, easy access to consultation reports, such as reports on aged care needs; accommodation needs assessment and social economic reports, which have been commissioned for government over the past 10 years.
This excludes the community from being informed, reviewing and commenting on any of the findings made in these reports.
The public can only access these reports/findings through the Freedom of Information Act.
Without government actioning and supporting any of the recommendations and findings made in these reports, the government has wasted a lot of precious time and money on consultants or committees to compile these reports and recommendations.
- Due to lack of government supportive action, CI community as a whole remains under- resourced, with standards below those on the mainland.

3 Local government's role in supporting and representing communities in the Indian Ocean territories

- The view of the CIWA is that the role of the Administrator could possibly be considered as unnecessary or obsolete.
As an alternative, the Local Government Shire President could perhaps be given increased capacity to serve as both, a Representative of the Minister and of Local Government. This would seem more appropriate, considering he or she has been elected by the local community to represent the local community, whereas the Administrator has not.
We wish Government explore how a Local Government Shire President's role could possibly be extended to include the role of an Administrator.



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This could also save considerable costs, which could be better spent, improving Local Government/Shire services.

The directors, by working together in consultation with Shire, could help reduce wasteful duplication. Duplication also delays decision-making.

In our community, decision-making has stalled, or decisions have been made, *without* regard for the voices of the community or their representatives.

This has been *evidenced* by numerous examples over many years, including the following:

- The May 2006 report of the Joint Standing Committee on National Capital and External Territories and its 13 recommendations published in the inquiry report.

All recommendations were practical and addressed the transparency and accountability of decision-making on C.I. and Cocos Keeling and to provide fairer working relationships between Canberra and Islanders, yet in 2007 the government rejected almost all of the recommendations, including the key theme: to give long-term island residents a say in government, the ability to make decisions regarding island affairs on island.

- Past and existing consultation mechanisms have *not* achieved any outcomes; therefore our seniors have still no residential age care and disability respite services. This forces them to relocate to either Perth or other cities. These family break-ups are not only extremely stressful, but could also be preventable, if residential age care was available.

- Extension of the jetty at the cost of 20 million dollars, which the majority of the local community did not deem a necessity.
In fact, the cruise ships are unable to reach C.I. during the wet or swell season regardless of the length of the jetty, although this is the main



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season cruise ships operate. This decision was hasty and lacked community consultation.

- The extension to the hospital at a cost of over 5 million dollars that the community was not aware of, until the building work commenced and people questioned what it was for. It did not include a wing suitable for residential age-care or respite placements for Disabled.

Essential background information regarding the 3rd point of reference

The CIWA is aware, however, that its views are not the views of the entire community, but the majority.

In particular, since the current local shire has worked very hard over the years, to raise the standard of living and reduce racism and inequality between different cultures. There are 3 councillors with a Malay background, two male and one female. There are 2 young councillors, with a Chinese and a Malay background, who are representing the younger generations on C.I.

Although this has greatly contributed towards filling the gap, (originally created by race-discrimination and inequality) between different cultures, some gaps still prevail to some degree today.

Yet, compared with the unfair discrimination in the not so distant past, (it is only 22 years ago that people from an Asian background were permitted to purchase and own land), the trust and respect of the local majority of people for their Local Government Shire is evidenced by their vote and strong, continuing support for Local Government.

The long term residents of the island, the Senior citizens, during their working lives, have built the economy with shovels and pick-axes while living in extremely crowded conditions, and much less pay, compared to non-Asian workers' pay and conditions. The majority of workers were and still are of Asian background. They suffered discrimination and inequality similar to that afforded to the Aboriginal people on Mainland:



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- They were confined to their own small area of beach access, well away from the jetty.
- They experienced segregation by having to send their children to separate schools.
- Asian children went in cattle-buses without windows, getting wet in the rain, While non-Asian children had modern buses with windows and didn't get wet in the rain on the way to school or home.

Yet the majority of hard working and dedicated Asian workers have developed the C.I. community.

Over the past few years, several more have passed away lonely, ending their lives in Perth or other cities, separated from their loved ones, because ineffective decision-making processes continue to fail to serve the needs of the senior citizens and their families on C.I.

Conclusion to this 3rd term of reference

Local Government Shire councillors, who *have* been elected by the community to present all of the community, who *have* local knowledge and *broader* understanding of the entire community's needs, are, in our view the best and most appropriate people to be given greater capacity for a stronger decision-making role in the Government's decision-making processes; In particular, when it comes to how, when and where government funding should be distributed in our community.

4 Opportunities to strengthen and diversify the economy, whilst maintaining and celebrating the unique cultural identity of the Indian Ocean Territories.

- It is likely that tourism will become a large part of the CI economy; therefore the marketing capacity needs to be increased. At present marketing is ad hoc.



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- Airport upgrade. Tourism is doomed to fail, with the present airport facilities. The current conditions of the airport can only facilitate for the airbus 302, depending on clear visibility.
The lack of a communication tower and limited landing strip prevents flights from landing during poor visibility.
As a result, flights are either cancelled, or forced to return to Perth. It happens on a regular basis.
This adds extra expense to both airline and passengers with connecting flights booked in advance.
As a consequence, many prospective visitors hesitate when planning their visit. So they chose a destination with more reliable services and much lower costs. The high cost to and from C.I is the result of a lack of a competitive airline market.
- Cost of airfares from and to Christmas Island is much too high, compared with other destinations. To increase tourism, flight paths must be changed, i.e. Perth to CI, CI to Singapore or Kuala Lumpur and return same route to Perth.
Visiting C.I. nature-based tourists often express an interest into visiting Cocos and Keeling Islands. However, the unreliable and inconvenient service discourages, rather than encourages visitors, when planning their trip/holidays.
- Since the price of oil has been reduced, almost every country in the world had their petrol prices reduced, except CI.
The lack of competition has resulted in serious profiteering. It's \$ 2.15 a litre for unleaded petrol, diesel is \$ 2.24.
The majority of Senior Citizens struggle already with the extremely high costs for food. Every cent makes a difference in their lives.



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- The very high cost of living in CI is also affecting the economy of CI. Like everywhere else in Australia, C.I. also has an increasing aging population. Without adequate age care, including residential age-care, or a Life-style retirement village, many families are forced to separate from their aging parents, as they have no other option than to re-locate them, to either the North or to Perth.
- Lack of available land.
Lack of available land for young and growing families already living in crowded conditions, forces them to relocate their aging parents to the cities.
These family break-ups are not only extremely stressful, but could also be preventable, if residential age care was available.
Lack of available land is also preventing the public and private sector from developing business investment opportunities.
- CIWA fully supports the development of the agricultural Mining to Plant Enterprise (Mintope) and the organic, sustainable vegetable production enterprise, 'Hidden Gardens' on C.I.
- CIWA, including the long term residents of CI, are becoming increasingly tired of not being consulted.
For this reason, many people feel very discouraged by the lack of supportive action over many years. Hence they now no longer believe that their needs and concerns will be considered by the Government in Canberra.
Some give up their work time money, in order to raise their voices, hoping to be heard.
This is what CIWA thinks: talk without any action is a waste of time.
CIWA urges the Commonwealth that it is time to move from thinking and planning to doing.