

Shire of Christmas Island

Submission to Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories

The Shire of Christmas Island welcomes the opportunity to meet with the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories to discuss matters of interest to the Christmas Island community. We thank the committee for its continuing interest in the well-being of our community.

Our Manager of Works and Services, Mr David Nielsen will address some remarks to the committee about specific issues to do with roads and dual use pathways funding arrangements with the Commonwealth.

1 Aged care facilities

There are approximately 50 aged pensioners resident on Christmas Island. The average age of the Mine's work force is over 55 years and many workers continue to work into their seventies. Therefore we have a significant number of Christmas Islanders, who in a relatively short time, may find themselves in need of aged care facilities such as a nursing home.

Christmas Island does not have a nursing home for the aged or a hospice or other infrastructure that could be converted to meet that need. New facilities must be built.

The Shire of Christmas Island has a plan to build a seniors centre adjacent to the Poon Saan Community Hall.

The Christmas Island Hospital provides the HAAC service. Getting the money for that service took three years of agitations from the UCIW in the late 1990s. It did require any buildings. If we are to build an aged care nursing home, the planning and commitment of funds should be commence now.

2 Housing our people

There is a critical shortage of housing for our Island population. This issue has been raised in many for a. The UCIW is investigating ways and means of developing a community housing project using a cooperative model.

3 Impact of DIAC operations

The Indian Ocean Territories Administration initiated a survey on cost of living on Christmas Island. We await the results of the survey.

The Commonwealth Administration initiated a community consultation to measure the impact of the operation of the Christmas Island Detention Centres. We have not been provided with the results of the survey. We would like the Department to release the full report to the public.

The Community Liaison Officer (CLO) employed by the Shire is a position funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). It is important to maintain this position as it provides vital feedback to the DIAC on the impact on the community of DIAC's operations. The CLO takes issues to DIAC and disseminates responses to individuals and groups who raise specific matters for response from DIAC. His direct involvement in community organisations enhances the CLO's understanding and engagement in community activities. The CLO is chair of the Indian Ocean Group Training Association and Christmas Island Neighbourhood Centre. The Christmas Island Neighbourhood Centre (CINC) has for some years provided group sessions for women in detention. This has been a very successful programme, supported financially by DIAC and Serco. CINC has also organised direct engagement between Christmas Island residents and refugees in cultural celebrations. Asylum-seekers have been deployed to work on restoration work on community infrastructure, such as the Naval gun and its precinct buildings at Smith Point.

4 Christmas Island Draft Recovery Plan

The community remains wary of the likely impacts of the **Christmas Island Draft Recovery Plan** on development of economic infrastructure but is supportive of the Plan's primary objectives of protecting threatened and endangered species.

5 Christmas Island Resort – Casino licence

The Shire supports the granting of a casino licence to the Christmas Island Resort. A fully operating resort will provide a foundation for tourism businesses to flourish. The tourism industry is almost non-existent but for our community remains one of the main hopes for our future.

6 Governance

We are encouraged by comments Minister Crean made when he was here in August. He said he wanted to change the governance arrangements to the effect of moving decision-making to the Islands. Although those comments might mean the department officers might be redeployed to Christmas Island we hope that a broader implication will be that the Administrator will be restored to some decision-making authority and thus make government decisions that are more responsive to the needs and demands of our community. In time we expect the Commonwealth will allow the governance of the Island to rest in the hands of the people of the Island.