
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Indian Ocean Territories

Review of the Annual Reports of the Department of Transport and Regional Services and the Department of the Environment and Heritage

Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories

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Canberra

Commonwealth of Australia 2004

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Foreword

No man is an island, entire of itself;
Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.¹

The Committee commenced this review of the work of the departments of Transport and Regional Services and the Environment and Heritage in the Indian Ocean Territories in July 2002. The completion of the review was delayed by the Committee's inquiry into governance on Norfolk Island which commenced in late March 2003. The findings and recommendations of this report, therefore, reflect the evidence received in 2002 and 2003. Since the Committee visited the territories in March 2003, some of the evidence received has been superseded by new developments. The Committee therefore acknowledges any perceived inadequacies with this particular report.

Nonetheless, two key issues identified in the evidence - the future economic sustainability and administrative direction of Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands - continue to be of great concern to the Committee. The recent decision not to re-issue the casino licence on Christmas Island and the manner in which this was done is troubling. The Committee is firmly of the view that genuine ongoing consultation with the Island communities must always be a priority for any Federal Government. Consultation cannot simply be dismissed as being in the eye of the beholder.

The Commonwealth is also implementing major changes to the administrative arrangements of the territories. In light of this and the casino licence decision, the Committee believes that an inquiry into the future governance arrangements for the Indian Ocean Territories is essential.

My Committee colleagues and I will take a keen and active interest in the responses to this report and in ensuring equality and a sustainable future for the communities of Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

1 John Donne (1572-1631), Meditation XVII

The Committee is grateful to all those who participated in this inquiry. We are especially grateful to those in the Indian Ocean Territories who assisted the Committee and for the hospitality shown to the Committee by the island communities during our visit in March 2003.

Senator Ross Lightfoot
Chairman



40th Parliament

Membership of the Committee

Chair Senator Ross Lightfoot

Deputy Chair Senator Trish Crossin

Members The Hon Ian Causley MP

Ms Annette Ellis MP

Mr Michael Johnson MP
(to 19 February 2004)

Mr Paul Neville MP

The Hon Warren Snowdon MP

Mr Cameron Thompson MP

Dr Mal Washer MP
(from 19 February 2004)

Senator John Hogg

Senator Kate Lundy

Senator Nigel Scullion

Senator Natasha Stott Despoja

Committee Secretariat

Secretary Mr Quinton Clements

Research Officer Mr Justin Baker

Administrative Officers Mrs Donna Quintus-Bosz

Mr Daniel Miletic



Terms of reference

That, in respect of its review of the Annual Reports of the Department of Transport and Regional Services 2002-2003 and the Department of Environment and Heritage 2002-2003, which stand referred to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories by the House of Representatives, it monitor the External Territories in order to review the development of services and the implementation of programs to a standard commensurate with equivalent mainland communities. In particular, the review should consider:

Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands:

- Justice and community safety;
- Education
- Environment and heritage;
- Health and community care;
- Transport, housing, land management and other urban services;
- Land use and land transfer by the Commonwealth Government;
- Economic development and tourism;
- Social and welfare services;
- Utilities.



List of recommendations

2 Governance in the Indian Ocean Territories

Recommendation 1

That the Federal Minister with responsibility for the external territories refer for inquiry and report the governance arrangements of the Indian Ocean Territories to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories.

3 Justice and community safety

Recommendation 2

That the Federal Government provide ongoing funding for the additional services needed to provide for use of the Christmas Island Recreation Centre as an emergency management centre and negotiate the relevant service delivery arrangement with the Western Australian Government for the establishment of a volunteer marine rescue group.

4 Education

Recommendation 3

That the Federal Government continue to provide financial support for Christmas Island residents wishing to complete years 11 and 12 on the mainland.

Recommendation 4

That the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (Cth) be amended to include the Indian Ocean Territories.

5 Environment and heritage

Recommendation 5

That the relevant Federal Government agencies – in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders on Christmas Island – undertake an assessment of the threat posed to the Island’s ecology from introduced species and support the ongoing campaign to control the yellow crazy ant problem.

Recommendation 6

That the owner of Oceania House, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Shire Council and other relevant parties, consider forming a legally binding agreement for the return of the Clunies-Ross busts and proclamation board for public display at Oceania House once restorations are complete. This agreement should include provisions to ensure public accessibility, security, maintenance and monitoring. In the interim, the Shire should make arrangements for the secure storage and preservation of these heritage items and consider how they may be displayed.

6 Health and community care

Recommendation 7

That the Commonwealth continue to consider ways of attracting suitable medical professionals to the Indian Ocean Territories, including special funding for Island residents undertaking relevant studies in health related professions, so they are encouraged to return to the Territories.

Recommendation 8

That an additional community nursing position responsible for aged care, child care and aspects of women’s health be established in the Indian Ocean Territories.

Recommendation 9

That a formal process be established whereby representatives from the Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands’ Shires meet regularly with representatives from the Indian Ocean Territories Health Service (IOTHS) and other relevant bodies to discuss public health issues and delineate responsibilities for dealing with them.

7 Transport, Housing, Land Management and other Urban Services

Recommendation 10

That, as a matter of urgency, the Federal Government undertake the construction of new port facilities in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

Recommendation 11

That the Federal Government ensures the following:

- that a ferry service continue to operate between West Island and Home Island; and
- the abolition of fares for this service.

Recommendation 12

That the Federal Government consult more fully with those affected by its policies of disposing of its properties before taking any further action to dispose of the properties.

Recommendation 13

That the Federal Government negotiate with the Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands with respect to the transfer of utilities on which there is mutual agreement.

9 Social and Welfare Services

Recommendation 14

That the Department of Transport and Regional Services establish a part-time social worker position for the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

Recommendation 15

That the Federal Government exempt non-profit community groups from paying rent for Commonwealth facilities in the Indian Ocean Territories.

Recommendation 16

That the Commonwealth arrange for a survey of the sporting and recreational needs of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands with a view to providing appropriate facilities in accessible locations.

