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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL CAPITAL
AND EXTERNAL TERRITORIES

Reference: Changing economic environment in the Indian Ocean territories

WEDNESDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER 2009

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JOINT STANDING
COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AND EXTERNAL TERRITORIES
Wednesday, 9 September 2009

Members: Senator Lundy (*Chair*), Mr Secker (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Crossin, Ferguson, Joyce and Scullion and Mr Adams, Ms Burke, Ms Annette Ellis, Mr Neville and Mr Turnour

Members in attendance: Senators Crossin, Ferguson, Joyce, Lundy and Scullion and Ms Burke.

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The changing economic environment in the Indian Ocean Territories giving consideration to current arrangements, barriers to business development and future need with regard to:

- a. communication services such as broadband internet, digital television and mobile telephony;
- b. transport services and costs including passenger and freight transport;
- c. Commonwealth Government services and programs;
- d. the operation of businesses in the region;
- e. cost and availability of housing; and
- f. the impact of climate change.

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Committee met at 1.17 pm

CHAIR (Senator Lundy)—I declare open this hearing of the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories. The committee is inquiring into the changing economic environment in the Indian Ocean territories. The inquiry was referred on 11 February 2009 by the Minister for Home Affairs. The committee will examine the changing economic environment in the Indian Ocean territories, giving consideration to current arrangements, barriers to business development and future need in relation to: (a) communication services, such as broadband internet, digital television and mobile telephony; (b) transport services and costs, including passenger and freight transport; (c) Commonwealth government services and programs; (d) the operation of business in the region; (e) cost and availability of housing and (f) the impact of climate change.

Today we will hear from representatives of the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. Before introducing the witnesses, I refer members of the media who may be monitoring this hearing to the need to fairly and accurately report the proceedings of the committee.

[1.18 pm]

COCHRANE, Mr Peter, Director of National Parks, Director of National Parks

EARLY, Mr Gerard, Deputy Secretary, Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts

CHAIR—I welcome representatives of the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. We have not received a written submission to this inquiry from you. Do you wish to present a submission or make an opening statement to the committee?

Mr Cochrane—No. We are happy to answer questions.

CHAIR—That is wonderful, and it is great to have you here. Perhaps you could describe to the committee an overview of the department's interaction and activities on Christmas Island and the Cocos and Keeling Islands.

Mr Cochrane—As Director of National Parks, we are responsible for the Christmas Island National Park, which makes up two-thirds of the island. We have a number of staff on there; our current average staffing over a year is about 22, so we are a significant presence on the island. Our major task is managing the park, and the primary task there is actually trying to conserve the biodiversity in the park and to maintain the functioning of the systems there.

We do maintain and provide limited visitor infrastructure, but the visitor numbers to the park and to the island are relatively low. We have a number of priority programs which the government has additionally funded us for, most notably the control of the yellow crazy ant, which is a particularly pernicious pest on the island and which has been there for something like 70 years. Since the late nineties its presence increased dramatically and it is having a very sustained and chronic impact on the island and its biodiversity; for example, this week we started aerial baiting the island for the second time to try to get another major knockdown of the ant population.

Senator JOYCE—How do you bait ants?

Mr Cochrane—It took us a while to work up and find an effective toxin. It is something called Fipronil, and it is delivered in a protein based meal. For most of the time we have been hand baiting, but if you have been on the island you would realise its topography is incredibly rugged and there is lots of the island that we just cannot physically get to and do by hand. Whilst we can do a couple of hundred hectares a year by hand to basically broadcast it, to really knock down the population on the island it is an aerial-baiting issue. We have done a number of tests with the last one we did, which was 2002, and this year have been referred under the EPBC Act because, obviously, on a sensitive environment like that delivering an aerial-baiting campaign is something we do not do lightly. But we are confident that the bait, as delivered, falls through the canopy and lands on the surface of the soil and is removed quickly.

We also have an active weeding program on the island, because there is a very substantial weed load. We have received some additional funding over recent years to accelerate that effort. They are our major programs, as well as the rehabilitation of rainforest from the legacy mines—that is something else we have been doing for many years. That has been slowly returning old mine sites to rainforest—where we can, and where the soil is available.

CHAIR—And what about the crabs? Are you involved in any programs?

Mr Cochrane—We are. The major issue with crabs is yellow crazy ants, because they have had a major impact on the crabs.

CHAIR—That is all about saving the crabs?

Mr Cochrane—Yes. But we have also, over the years, slowly added—with the assistance, for a while, of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship when the detention facility was being constructed—crab crossings to allow the crabs to cross the major roads. They cross underneath the roads primarily when they are migrating, and that has reduced crab mortality significantly. That was, and still is, a source of crab mortality but it has been reduced dramatically through just the physical means of putting crossings under the roads.

CHAIR—Are there any other priority programs, or programs that you are engaged in that we ought to know about?

Mr Cochrane—We work cooperatively with the Christmas Island Tourism Association. We work very closely with them because we think there is a lot of future potential with tourism and so there is a very cooperative arrangement where we participate where we can in building the opportunities for, particularly, nature based tourism on the island.

CHAIR—To what degree are you resourced to do that, or does that have to be found within your program funding for all of these other initiatives?

Mr Cochrane—Essentially, the operations that I run, which are across a number of parks, are funded through a one-line budget item. It is really up to me and my executive as to how we allocate the funds. However, as I said, we have had extra funds from new policy proposals, in particular the yellow crazy ant activity which we received additional funding for and which bolstered our existing funding.

CHAIR—Can I ask you to take on notice providing the committee with an outline of the budget associated with the presence of the department on the island, including the subset of that for those existing priority programs but also the separate funding for the new policy proposals.

Mr Cochrane—Certainly.

Ms BURKE—Do you employ any locals?

Mr Cochrane—Yes, in fact the majority of our staff are locals. It does depend a little bit on who you define as a local but the vast majority of our staff would be locals.

Senator SCULLION—The original baiting program had some challenges with bait because we were not sure whether it impacted on the robber crabs' capacity to breed, and we did some work on that. We are now putting another type of bait out and it is an assumption, but perhaps you can tell us the differential just briefly or, if you like, take it on notice if it is a huge, technical thing. I am just looking for a level of confidence that the Fipronil is not going to do the same things we were afraid of in the first instance.

Mr Cochrane—Our major approach with robber crabs, because they are susceptible to the poison, is with diversionary bait and we are proposing to do the same thing we did last time which was very successful and that is put out chook pellets which the robber crabs love. So before the helicopter goes over we lay baits away from there to attract the robber crabs out of the path of the helicopter. The helicopter can deliver baits within metre accuracy, so we know precisely where the baits are going. So diversionary baiting is a pretty tested and successful method for dealing with the robber crabs.

I should say, and it is a publicly available document in the referral that we put to the department for this particular campaign, that Fipronil is not without its difficulties and we are currently undertaking some additional work looking at the potential movement of Fipronil through the island ecosystem. So far—and our approval has been based on the information so far—we are absolutely convinced that the risks of not doing the aerial baiting completely outweigh the risks that we know of in wider impacts.

Senator SCULLION—My next question goes that risk assessment. Given you have just told us about the places you are using the helicopter, in terms of efficiency—and just correct me if I am wrong—they are going to be those areas that you cannot get to on foot or by walking around.

Mr Cochrane—Generally speaking, that is absolutely correct. But we have spent the last three months essentially walking the island. There are something like a thousand points completely covering the island in a grid that we survey for red crab populations, crazy ant populations and a few other things. That allows us to map very accurately the boundaries particularly of the super colonies which is what we are targeting, and the helicopter is tasked with getting those. We have had to make a couple of exemptions and one was around the kampong area. There were some concerns that we would be baiting a super colony close to it and that is still a problem for us because it is utterly impossible to do by hand. However, the community was concerned about aerial baiting too close to them and so we have excised that from the aerial campaign.

Senator SCULLION—Because you have diversionary bait for robber crabs, you can only deliver the diversionary baits by hand. So in those areas where the helicopter is now operating, which is in the vast majority of the island, will there be no diversionary baits?

Mr Cochrane—No.

Senator SCULLION—Will there be diversionary baits dropped by the helicopter?

Mr Cochrane—No, the robber crabs have a remarkable capacity to find food at a considerable distance, so they will travel a long way and for whatever reason chook pellets seem to be remarkably attractive to them.

Senator SCULLION—You are telling me that you can pull all the robber crabs out of an area completely. Even if some of the areas, like the kampong area, are just unbelievably rugged and rough and you cannot get in there, are you confident that you get all of them out of there?

Mr Cochrane—Yes, I am confident from what my staff tell me. I have not actually been out there watching it.

Senator SCULLION—So you will be validating that as well? As part of the referral you will be expected to go in and see if we have any?

Mr Cochrane—You can actually see the robber crabs come out clustered around these diversionary baits. That gives you a fair degree of confidence that they work.

Senator SCULLION—You can understand we have gone through this before and it is just looking for a high level of competence. I acknowledge the work you have done on the new bait. We are all sad that it did not really go the way we wanted. When we look at the report after this, I have got an expectation that there will be an area on the robber crab about what scientifically we think was the impact. It is not as if we are looking for bodies lying around. That would be very easy. It will be the future generations we will know whether or not it had an impact.

Mr Cochrane—To be fair, I will not put my hand on my heart and say there will not be a handful of casualties, but what we are looking for is the overall effect on the island. As you say, some of those areas we will not know.

Senator SCULLION—Indeed. I appreciate that. Clearly in the nature-based tourism one of the best things that parks can provide is an interpretive service, whether it is signage, whether it is training for to take people around some of these things. As you know, we have got some iconic stuff on Christmas Island, the little lakes and those sorts of things. What sort of investment have you made and what is in the budget for those things?

Mr Cochrane—We have done a review of our signage and we are aiming to roll out new interpretive signage in the park. We have been working with Christmas Island Tourism on tour guide materials and not so much an accreditation process but at least a program to ensure that local guides have good information.

Senator SCULLION—Is there any requirement for people to be licensed to take people around the park and take money off them?

Mr Cochrane—If there were commercial tour operations in the park, which there are not, they would need a permit.

Senator SCULLION—What would that permit require? In terms of training, would you require them to pass a course?

Mr Cochrane—You would know our experience in Kakadu. In the beginning there were no requirements and progressively over time, as the industry became more sophisticated and the issues became more complicated, we have progressively introduced more and more rigorous standards. Christmas Island is really at the very beginning of all of this and we are not aiming to

put hurdles in front of it, we would like to facilitate the industry on the island. The committee would be well aware of the proposed cruise ship from Carnival, the *Pacific Sun*, coming in December. We have been working closely with Christmas Island Tourism to do what we can to prepare for that so that the one-day experience on the island of the passengers is as good as we can help make it. That is a pretty exciting opportunity for the island.

Senator SCULLION—There was Green Corps and I understand there is a similar program. You have got a lot of staff out of that program as it went through and you did a lot of your rehabilitation. Are you accessing a similar sort of program at the moment?

Mr Cochrane—No, and you may know something I do not, but I do not believe we access Green Corps for that. The rehabilitation work is all funded out of the conservation levy from the mining company.

Senator SCULLION—They were simply working at the nursery. That is where the assumption came from, because the nursery went and planted in rehabilitation. I am sure there were clear divisions.

Mr Cochrane—We were successful a few years ago in winning a contract for supplying plants to the immigration facility and that allowed us to build up our numbers in the nursery. That was a sizeable contract for us. Things like that do not happen very often, but we have got the capacity to deliver those things. In terms of our impact on the island, employment is probably the most important one in terms of the island economy, with 22 staff. There is a sizeable seasonal component in it. At the moment is something of the order of 35 staff, because we employ casuals to help us with peak loads. Because of the scientific interest in the island and the particular suite of problems that we have got at the moment with invasive species et cetera, there has been a considerable increase in the scientific effort on the island. We have had a wide range of visiting scientists over the last four or five months and I am told that at its peak we had an additional 23 scientists on the island.

Senator JOYCE—Where from?

Mr Cochrane—All over—Victoria, Perth. People from zoos have been out there helping with the proposed captive-breeding programs, and that has been a big issue for us. I notice your terms of reference include issues like housing. A number of those scientists had to be housed in tents in the park because there was no housing available on the island.

CHAIR—Is the presence of that many scientists cyclical? Is it unusual to have so many? Does it tend to be during certain seasons? How does it work?

Mr Cochrane—It would be unusual to have that many. We are very attractive to interns, particularly from Europe and Japan. Some of their degrees involve three to 12 months study somewhere. We have had about a dozen interns a year, and they come for varying amounts of time. We support them in their activities both with transport and guidance. We help work up projects for them that will help us improve management of the park. There is an opportunity to do a lot more with that as well. At the moment, probably the most significant limiting factor is places for people to stay.

Senator SCULLION—So you are not accessing a program similar to Green Corps at the moment.

Mr Cochrane—Indian Ocean Group Training provided some assistance with getting people into work and we used some of that capacity.

Senator SCULLION—So the answer is no.

Mr Cochrane—I think the answer is no, but can I take that on notice?

Senator SCULLION—Yes. Could you also give your thoughts about engaging a similar program in the future?

Mr Cochrane—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—I saw the announcement this week about the pipistrelle bat. What has caused the demise of that bat?

Mr Cochrane—If we knew we would have been able to take appropriate action. There has been a research program on that for 10 years, with the recovery plan. We have done everything that has been suggested that we do. The researchers and I spoke to the lead researcher just over a week ago in the tail phase of the capture effort, and they are still no closer to identifying the cause. It is likely to be a complex series of factors. It is hard not to implicate the crazy ant somewhere in that chain of events. The interim report in June of the expert working group that the minister commissioned hypothesised some sort of cascade of events, but that still does not help us identify clear management actions that would have halted that decline. I will not go into the theory, but they hypothesised that the introduced giant centipedes were a problem, possibly predated on the bats, something they do in other places. It is possible that the changes in the forest structures as a result of crazy ants have played a role. There is a concern, which we are testing, that something we have done has had an impact on the bats. The decline has been going on for a long time, so it is likely to be the result of sustained and chronic changes in the island ecosystem.

Senator CROSSIN—Where is the application for the mining leases extension up to, vis-a-vis the requirements under the EPBC Act?

Mr Early—As you know, the Federal Court referred the matter back to the minister. PRL submitted a supplementary submission because it had been so long since the original assessment in April this year. That was put out for public comment and about 300 submissions were received. The company has gone through those and put in some more information. We are currently in the process of finalising the assessment for submission to the minister to make the decision.

Senator CROSSIN—When are you expected to have it completed by?

Mr Early—'Shortly' is about all I could say.

Senator CROSSIN—That is what my 13-year-old says when I ask her to clean up her room and guess what happens: she never does. Was their application for the nine leases to be considered individually or did they resubmit for consideration the nine leases all at once?

Mr Early—It is the same—

Senator CROSSIN—parcel?

Mr Early—It is the same process, so they have simply resubmitted information on the basis, obviously, that a lot had happened since they had originally submitted the material. They had a copy of the department's assessment report and various information, so, obviously, they wanted to respond to that. It is actually the same proposal as was submitted originally.

Senator CROSSIN—One of my final questions is this. Maunsell/AECOM were contracted to actually do an assessment of the impact of climate change on the IOTs. That was in a response we got from the department that we saw a couple of weeks ago. It did not actually tell us very much other than it is being considered. What role will parks now play in the discussion about this report and the implications of this report?

Mr Cochrane—That report is actually one of many. About two or three years ago I commissioned an assessment of the potential impacts of climate change on all Commonwealth reserves. That report was released about a year ago. The report you are referring to did not add very much to what we already knew. I would have to say the major management challenge for us at the moment is dealing with invasive species. Obviously, we are concerned about the impact of climate change in changing that risk or enhancing it, as in making life more difficult. But at the moment our major issues are our immediate problems. They tend to overwhelm the—

Senator CROSSIN—Sure. Is that in relation to some of the islands out at Cocos that you also have?

Mr Cochrane—Yes, we have had a look at that.

Senator CROSSIN—You have the same invasive species there?

Mr Cochrane—No. We are lucky that the condition of Pulu Keeling National Park is far better than that of Christmas Island. In no small degree that is a result of its remoteness. Christmas Island has been subject to regular shipping traffic and lots of activities over many years, whereas Pulu Keeling is a long way from the main atoll.

Senator CROSSIN—As for the report you did on the impact of climate change, are you talking about all the areas of—

Mr Cochrane—Commonwealth reserves.

Senator CROSSIN—Are you able to supply the committee with information?

Mr Cochrane—Sure. It is on our website.

Senator CROSSIN—If it is on the website that is okay. We can find it.

Mr Cochrane—It is called the Hyder report, from Hyder Consulting.

Senator CROSSIN—Finally I will ask this, and you will not be surprised I am going to ask you this. What is the amount of money you are currently getting in your budget for infrastructure compared to that in the last two or three successive budgets?

Mr Cochrane—I did not actually bring those numbers with me. We certainly got a capital injection this year in this budget. I will have to take that on notice.

Senator CROSSIN—That is okay.

Mr Cochrane—It was a number of million. It was something like \$4½ million plus an additional \$3.1 million for repairs and maintenance, ongoing.

Senator CROSSIN—For Christmas and Cocos?

Mr Cochrane—No, for Commonwealth reserves as a whole. It is in addition to our budget as a whole. But we will, and the minister did announce this, be spending at least a million on that on better red crab protection on the island. Some of the work that is currently underway with scientists on the island is helping us focus on where that might be best spent.

Senator CROSSIN—On average how many scientists would stay there each year for a month or so at a time? Do you think that if we are looking at future economic potentials for the IOTs one of those may well be to create a science/research hub on the island under, say, the CSIRO or a university? Do you think there would be the potential for us as a committee to investigate that further and look at a recommendation in that area?

Mr Cochrane—Absolutely, and it is an idea that we have explored ourselves. There is a lot of potential for that because of its scientific and biological interest. There would be enough interest to sustain some continuing research activity on the island.

Senator CROSSIN—For how many would you need housing and research facilities at any one time? Five? Twenty?

Mr Cochrane—You could probably have half a dozen scientists and support staff. We have had some very preliminary discussions with a number of universities as to whether they would be interested in establishing some sort of field station out there. I have to say that, because of our other issues that are of more immediate priority, we have focused our resources on those as opposed to that sort of development.

Senator CROSSIN—Sure, but it could be something that the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research might pick up and look at. Are people currently staying at Gordon Bennett's house and headquarters when they come here?

Mr Cochrane—The pink house?

Senator CROSSIN—Yes, the pink house.

Mr Cochrane—Yes, it has been set up for accommodation. We have displaced them for a little bit because that is where we are running the captive breeding for bats and skinks.

Senator CROSSIN—But, in your view, it could sustain at least a dozen or so people in some sort of research hub?

Mr Cochrane—I would have thought it would have that capacity or possibly more, particularly with our experience of interns who come under their own steam with their own money. We do have a little bit of a preliminary think piece on this which I would be happy to share with you.

Senator CROSSIN—Yes, I think that would be useful.

CHAIR—We are going to have to wrap this up. We do still need to call Immigration, albeit very briefly before question time. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our witnesses for their evidence. I know you have been given some questions on notice, so we look forward to receiving those responses as soon as possible. Thank you very much for appearing before us today.

[1.47 pm]

CORRELL, Mr Bob, Deputy Secretary, Department of Immigration and Citizenship

WILSON, Ms Jackie, First Assistant Secretary, Department of Immigration and Citizenship

CHAIR—I am very conscious of the tight time but I do want to press ahead. I welcome representatives of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to today's hearing. Do you have anything to say about the capacity in which you appear before the committee?

Ms Wilson—I am division head of community and detention at the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

CHAIR—Thanks, Ms Wilson. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence on oath, I should advise you that these hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and therefore have the same standing as proceedings of the respective houses. We have received a written submission to this inquiry from you. Does the department have any objection to having the submission authorised for publication and placed on the committee website?

Mr Correll—No objection.

CHAIR—Thank you; it is so ordered. Do you wish to present any additional submissions or make an opening statement to the committee? I should say in inviting you to do that: that may be all we have time for, in which case the committee will either find a way to get you some questions on notice or contemplate talking to you another day and arranging that post our visit to the Indian Ocean territories.

Mr Correll—I do have a short statement which provides some information.

CHAIR—That would be a good place to start, given the time.

Mr Correll—The Department of Immigration and Citizenship has maintained a presence on Christmas Island for the better part of the past decade. In 2001 the department opened an immigration detention facility known as Phosphate Hill to cope with increasing numbers of irregular maritime arrivals at that time. The department has a range of immigration detention facilities on Christmas Island allowing us to respond flexibly to the changing composition and number of arrivals. As at 3 September this year, there were 665 people in immigration detention on Christmas Island.

The economic impact these activities have had on the Christmas Island community is hard to quantify, especially when you take into account the fluctuating nature of arrivals and corresponding levels of immigration activity as a result. Overall, the impact of immigration activity on the Christmas Island economy can be considered relatively low despite high activity peaks in 2001 and 2009. The biggest direct impact on the local economy has been the employment of local labour. Currently, around 97 Christmas Island locals are employed as a

result of the department's immigration detention and construction activities. The largest proportion is employed in catering and facilities management activities.

The department has always been conscious of the need to balance its activities with the requirements of the local community and, if possible, provide positive impacts. This has meant providing additional funding for the local school to ensure that unaccompanied minors and the children of people in detention are appropriately educated without placing a strain on the existing school system. In addition, public transport and recreation facilities have improved their sustainability because of the department's recent decision to purchase a set number of monthly bus and recreation passes. The department's continued presence on Christmas Island will be carefully managed to ensure that we not only deliver a humane and fair immigration process but also consider the needs of people living in the community and, where possible, create positive impacts for the community.

Senator FERGUSON—You said there were 97 local people engaged there. What is the average total number of employees at the detention centre? I would like to get an idea of the ratio of locals to non-locals.

Mr Correll—The total number of employees engaged in detention and related facilities there—and this is not just within the department; there are more contractors than departmental staff—is just under 300. So about one-third of the employees are local.

Senator FERGUSON—Does it fluctuate depending on the number of people detained?

Mr Correll—Absolutely.

Senator FERGUSON—So locals could be either out of work or in work depending on the numbers?

Mr Correll—Yes, very much so—particularly in areas like catering and other management of logistics and facilities. That varies depending on the scale of activity occurring on the island. In some areas, like the maintenance of facilities and grounds, there is stability in the level of employment. But clearly there are fixed and variable components.

Ms BURKE—I want to ask about the people who come on and off the island—their interactivity with the community and the money they bring in. Do you house them on the site, or are they housed externally? Hopefully, if you have an influx of people coming in and out, they might also be bringing some money into the island community.

Mr Correll—Absolutely. The staff and contractors are housed in houses and unit type accommodation within the community. In purchasing meals and in everything they do, they bring funding into the community. In our staff induction we try and emphasise that they are our representatives within the community at all times so they need to be sensitive to the fact that they are coming into the community and sensitive to the community's values.

Ms BURKE—Did you build them the housing on the island? We know that that is an issue. Was housing available, or have you had to build additional housing?

Ms Wilson—We have about 160 bed-sits on the island, which we built and which the department owns. Most of our staff and many of our providers are in those bed-sits. We own two three-bedroom houses and 10 three-bedroom duplexes. We tend to use the duplexes for families and unaccompanied minors to get them out into the community. We are trying to use the facilities we currently own. On top of that, at the moment we have six houses on short-term lease. But we do not want to impact on the rental market and drive prices up, so we are very conscious about the sorts of decisions we make.

Ms BURKE—How about the people who visit the island, like lawyers and advocacy groups? I know it is probably not as big an issue now as it was in 2001, but it is still an ongoing issue. I know it is not your responsibility but, as they are attached to the centre, from where are you getting the housing and facilities that they are using?

Ms Wilson—We primarily use our own facilities where that is possible. Where it is not possible, we would use commercial facilities that might be available. But, as I said, we are very conscious about the decisions we make. We monitor things like school groups coming onto the island. We make sure that we make available all that they need. We work closely with the Attorney-General's Department to facilitate that aspect.

Senator SCULLION—There will be a couple of questions on notice, no doubt. Obviously one of the tensions you have always had to negotiate on the island is this unease that the islanders—people who live there and see themselves as locals—do not get as much access to employment, whether that is right or wrong. Do you have a strategy to try to maximise local employment? If you need to give the answer on notice as to whether you actually have a policy, we would appreciate that.

Mr Correll—No problems. We do have an active approach in relation to that, not only with us but through our contractors. At the present stage, we are in the process of transitioning to the new main contracted provider on the islander, Serco. Serco has been very actively engaging in local meetings with local people and the community to offer employment opportunities. We also offer a traineeship arrangement, and there is the issue of staff level as well. We are looking to expand those traineeship arrangements. So our strategy is absolutely to attempt to maximise employment opportunities for local employees. We understand Serco has also been able to secure local people from the Cocos Islands, where the unemployment is particularly high. They will also be among the workers on Christmas Island.

Senator SCULLION—Excellent. I have some questions on notice on the detail and breakdown of those, and I will pass them through the secretariat.

CHAIR—Thank you, Senator Scullion. I ask colleagues to get questions on notice to Stephanie in the secretariat by close of business tomorrow. We have asked witnesses to provide additional material by Wednesday, 23 September; that would be great. Thank you very much for your time today. I do apologise for the delay, but we felt it was very important to at least get you before the committee and get your submission authorised. We can move on from there. Thank you.

Resolved (on motion by **Ms Burke**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 1.56 pm