



Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works

Submission to the inquiry into the Cocos (Keeling) Islands — West Island, Seawater Reverse Osmosis Plant Project

Dear Committee members

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (DITRDCA) — Cocos (Keeling) Islands — West Island, Seawater Reverse Osmosis Plant project.

About the Cocos (Keeling) Islands

The Cocos (Keeling) Islands are located 2,935 km from Perth and 985 km from Christmas Island. They are a group of 27 low-lying coral islands that form two atolls. The total land area is 15.6 km.



The 593 residents of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands are located on two of the islands: Home Island and West Island. The majority of residents are Cocos Malay and live on Home Island. At the [2021 Census](#), 70% of households on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands reported that a non-English language was spoken at home, being Cocos Malay, a unique dialect of Malay. The remaining population identifies as being of European descent. The Cocos (Keeling) Islands is a tropical environment that encircles turquoise lagoon waters and is only three metres above mean sea level.

The Cocos (Keeling) Islands' economy is heavily reliant on Commonwealth-funded projects, activities and services, with small contributions from other industries, including tourism. The tourism industry has potential for future growth. However, any growth must be balanced with broader impacts on regional accessibility, environment, infrastructure, and residents.

About the Indian Ocean Territories Regional Development Organisation

The [Indian Ocean Territories Regional Development Organisation](#) (IOT RDO) is one of 53 organisations located across Australia that are part of the Regional Development Australia network, funded by the DITRDCA. The IOT RDO is working to facilitate sustainable development in the region, and to build strong and confident local economies on both Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

IOT RDO 2030 Strategic Regional Plan

The IOT RDO recently published the [IOT RDO 2030 Strategic Regional Plan](#). The plan aims to leverage the region's natural assets and community strengths to foster a more diverse economy and a

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stronger, more resilient, and capable region. This can be achieved through strategic coordination and collaboration to overcome barriers to investment and economic activity. The Seawater Reverse Osmosis Plant project falls within the following priorities identified in the regional plan:

2030 Strategic priority	Focus area	Regional benefit
SP1 - Support sustainable growth and development, and improve liveability for our communities	SP 1.3 - Achieve improvements in local and regional priorities that impact sustainable growth and development, and liveability, that can only be influenced at the macro level.	Improvements in priority areas, including addressing infrastructure capacity constraints.
SP4 - Develop regional capability	SP4.3 - Increase the benefits of major projects to our local communities.	Major government and privately funded projects are leveraged to provide direct benefit to our local communities, including but not limited to employment and training outcomes, contracts, and legacy infrastructure.
SP5 - Maximise sustainable tourism growth potential for long-term business viability	SP5.2 – Improve tourism assets, infrastructure and services.	A coordinated approach to upgrading existing or developing new tourism assets, infrastructure and services is undertaken to maximise benefits to the wider community and visitors.

Diversification of the economy and community benefit from major projects

A core principle that guides the IOT RDO 2030 Strategic Regional Plan is *the requirement to transition the economy from a narrowly based and underdeveloped market to a diversified and more robust market driven economy*, and the visitor economy (tourists and visiting friends and relatives) is a key industry identified for development. In recent years, potential developments in this industry have not progressed, in part due to limitations on usage of West Island’s essential services.

In addition to providing long-term water security, the proposed Seawater Reverse Osmosis Plant on West Island will remove one of the numerous barriers to sustainable tourism and other development. It will also provide short-term contract and employment opportunities for residents and local businesses. The IOT RDO would like to acknowledge the coordination and collaboration by DITRDCA and the Department of Defence for this project, which will result in positive outcomes and lasting benefit to the local community and economy.

Farzian Zainal

A/Chairperson
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