

Submission to the Select committee

30th October 2005

Sirs,

I am a 25 year resident of Norfolk Island so feel that I have the right to air my views with confidence.

I came from New Zealand, but applied and received Australian citizenship as soon as soon as I was eligible. I was therefore of the very strong opinion that anybody who stood for our legislative assembly should be an Australian citizen as any country cannot have foreigners ruling them.

I was very please to see appropriate legislation put through by the Federal Govt which helps to reinforce to locals the fact that we are an integral part of Australia.

I am a prolific letter writer to our newspaper regarding our assembly.

There are a lot of things said about the closed society in Norfolk Island, it is closed to a certain extent but no more closed than any other large family.

However it is not closed in the extent that one family will always be free with their information about another family.

This is no different to other small communities on mainland Australia. However we get more publicity regarding this because we advertise ourselves as a wonderful society.

It is closed overall in the respect of the misguided concept that we must pretend that we are perfect.

An example is when the local lad in his twenties murdered his Govt Minister father there was a small article in the following weeks paper saying that there had been an unfortunate incident.

O.K but that is the last that we have heard.

Nothing about a person being charged.

Nothing about a person being held.

Nothing about a tribunal deciding on his mental health.

Nothing about him appearing in court and being sentenced.

Nothing about whether he is still on the Island at large or in prison.

The Govt just closed ranks in conjunction with the newspaper.

The only news that we got was from the Sydney Morning Herald.

My argument is that as a community we have the right to know what has happened after a killing of this sort has gone through an open court. We still do not know officially what has happened even though the grapevine tells us that he has been to court and has been charged and sentenced, with what and what was the sentence?

I have written many letters regarding the assemblies lack of foresight in communications i.e.mobile phones etc.

They now have an independent report on this.

Will they act on it?

The reason they have given in the past is that we had a referendum on this issue and at the time the community said no-so the assembly took the easy way out and

agreed. Their argument was they had to abide by the will of the people regardless of the money that could have been generated for the good of the community.

To have referenda on day by day decisions that the Govt should be making is ridiculous.

But even before this referendum they had another one put forward by the assembly regarding the voting system and the community overwhelmingly voted that there had to be a change.

This and previous assemblies still occasionally discuss this but have done nothing.

This and other assemblies have not had any foresight regarding infrastructure, If this and past assemblies had bitten the bullet and borrowed to construct a proper harbour it would have and still could reduce living costs by having a more efficient shipping service instead of ships having to stand off for days at a time due to inclement weather.

We could also act as a home port for one of the navy ships which would also bring in income for us and future generations, as well as having cruise ships to generate more income to pay off the infrastructure without having to cover the Island with more hotels etc..

Past assemblies have discounted this concept as it would make us more obvious a part of Australia if we had a defence force ship come in here.

Many will not accept they we are integrally Australia.

Another argument is that we have not got enough rock on the Island to make a breakwater harbour. Many years ago I gave them the name of Australian engineers who advised me that they had built large breakwaters on the Northern coasts of the mainland (which gets far stronger cyclones than us) without using rock at all. The Govt did not bother enquiring further.

Our assemblies consider that fiscal responsibility is to never borrow even for potential money making infrastructure and social well being. (until the airport of course when they were forced to)

This has to change in respect to money making project infrastructure or we will never survive. It would be very hard for us to pay off a harbour so it is one area that I feel the Federal Govt should help us with and even should even insist that one is built. It is vital for the long term survival of the Island.

As for taxation, it is obvious that we have to have some form of tax.

I am supportive of GST but I can see it will never work here unless we have an outside policing of it because people working for the administration have outside business interests themselves and even those that don't do have family members that are in business. The problem being that a large part of the population consists of just four or five families.

Therefore the only efficient way at the moment is land tax.

However as many Islanders own large tracts of land most of the assembly is against it as most members of the public refuse to accept the fact of life that we have to pay something to get all the necessary amenities.

We have one assembly member that owns a large block of land state in the paper that if we have to have land rating it should be on blocks of land. I.E. if one owns 10 hectares he should pay the same as a householder who lives on one tenth of a

hectare. Therefore of course that would mean that 100 small householders would pay 100 times more than the ten hectare owner. I am all for rates but it has to be fair and therefore in my opinion we would have to have an "improved value" system of rating.

I own a very small block approx 430 square metres in the shopping area on which I have a shop and living accommodation above.

I would expect that with "improved value" rating I would be paying at least as much as the person with ten hectares with a house on at today's values. That is fair as I am in the retail area.

The average comment here is that we would still not raise enough money for what is needed. It would be a great help though and most people are of course underestimating what could be charged because they have never had to pay any tax at all.

We are slowly but surely reaching the stage where small income earners will not be able to pay their hospital fees even if they have the local insurance, so we desperately need help in that respect, we should be part of medicare, with the money needed to pay the Federal Govt to give us this being added onto the rating system. People renting would be paying it in the rents, people with more assets with the improved value system would be paying more. Fair.

Present wages in most areas of employment are every bit as good as their mainland counterparts and in most areas better through not having to pay income tax.

If you check this out you will see what I mean.

I have a qualified gemologist daughter working on the Gold Coast in a jewellery store on a casual basis, there she gets \$14.00 per hour less tax etc. Over here an unqualified shop worker in a jewellery shop on a casual basis gets between \$13.00 & \$14.00 per hour--no tax

So many wages here are comparable to mainland, maybe a little better. You can ask other people and you may get a different story but if you do a personal check you will find that I am right. Teachers, Police etc get the same as mainland but without tax.

However trade companies do charge out at a lesser rate than mainland. I.E Plumber charge out is \$25.00 to \$30.00 per hour and they pay their tradesmen \$15.00 to \$18.00 per hour.

Income tax would not work here if locally run for the same reason as previously stated and to get people from outside to police it would be too costly for the amount that it could generate if it was on the same scales as mainland.

Our assembly needs direction. A couple of years ago they asked for submissions on a new type of Govt. My submission basically was to have an administrator who would be in charge of the public service who would control the Island in all aspects except for the making of laws and budgeting which would be done by the assembly. At the moment assembly members waste time by getting too involved in matters that could be handled by a good public service. (Not that I am necessarily criticising the one that we have already got)

I.E. to get a building approval the application must go through five or six departments to ensure that it meets all planning approvals and building codes etc.

Once approved that should be it, but no- it has to go to an inexperienced minister who studies it, approves it and sometimes rejects it.

I find this is a great place to live but if we get too many powers I can see it could be a terrible place to live in many aspects of life. Please do not let the Federal Govt grant us more powers, we do need overseeing.

Yours truly,

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