

## The need

- 2.1 Mr Peter Seman, Project Manager, Cocos Capital Works Program Gutteridge Haskins and Davey Pty Ltd, providing evidence at the public hearing on behalf of the Department of Transport and Regional Services (DoTRS), contended that:

...the current infrastructure and operations are inadequate. There are unsafe passenger transfers at the exposed West Island jetty and there are unsafe freight handling practices at the West Island beach landing ... There are also inefficient freight handling operations and procedures, which are characterised by the single container movements across the lagoon on the *Biar Berjaya*. The facilities are also inadequate for transporting large or heavy plant. The current beach landing operations are both dangerous and time consuming.<sup>1</sup>

- 2.2 In its submission the DoTRS advised that the need to upgrade the existing freight handling infrastructure had been acknowledged by the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories in 1995 in its report entitled *Delivering the Goods*. The proposal presented in DoTRS' submission addresses both *freight* and *passenger* transport needs.

## Advantages of proposal

- 2.3 According to DoTRS, construction of new freight and passenger facilities at Rumah Baru would achieve the following:
- safer freight handling procedures on West Island and passenger transfers, thereby decreasing the risk of serious injury;
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<sup>1</sup> Evidence, p. 9.

- meet the current and long term needs of the community;
- provide all-weather passenger transport and freight handling facilities, including shelter for craft during heavy weather conditions;
- provide flexible infrastructure capable of being upgraded to handle increased levels of freight and passenger volumes in the future;
- form the basis of an integrated freight and passenger strategy that satisfies operational and community requirements and provides the required level of management and protection of the marine environment in the long term;
- create short and long term job opportunities for the local community that will help to relieve the current unemployment problem and develop the skills base;
- move towards normalisation of the standard of infrastructure with the rest of Australia;
- improve facilities for launching, retrieving and mooring boats; and
- minimise the impact that private craft presently have on the environment in the currently uncontrolled mooring sites by mooring private craft offshore adjacent to the Offshore Island and Access Bridge. The current impact includes damage to seabed, coral, seagrasses and marine life from anchors, propellers, fuel and other pollution.<sup>2</sup>

## **Potential consequences of not proceeding**

2.4 In its submission DoTRS stated that the consequences of not proceeding with the proposed Offshore Island development at Rumah Baru would include the continuation of unsafe passenger and freight handling practices, which may result in injuries or loss of goods or equipment. In the opinion of the Department, failure to construct the facilities will result in:

- continuation of costly repairs and maintenance of existing infrastructure;
- the need for a major upgrade of the existing jetty;
- limited opportunity to develop the tourism industry on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. Tourism is still in its infancy and, according to DoTRS:

will remain that way until improved infrastructure is developed.<sup>3</sup>

- continuation of inefficient and hazardous freight handling operations and procedures, including the transfer of loaded containers one at a time across the Lagoon from Home Island to West Island and return of empty containers back to Home Island;
- continuation of unsafe passenger transfers in the long term;
- continued inability to transport large items between the Islands; and
- continuation of the environmental damage to the seabed, coral, seagrass and marine life from the permanent moorings.<sup>4</sup>

2.5 During its inspections at both Home Island and West Island the Committee was able to observe freight handling operations. The hazardous nature of these operations was clearly evident.

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3 Submissions, p. 6.

4 Submissions, p. 7.