



**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL CAPITAL  
AND EXTERNAL TERRITORIES**

Inquiry into Governance on Norfolk Island

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **Continued self-government for Norfolk Island conditional on implementation of good governance reforms**

Federal parliament's External Territories Committee has today tabled a report calling for widespread changes to the conduct of governance on Norfolk Island.

The report seeks to preserve the principle of self-government for Norfolk Island, but to make it more transparent and effective through the introduction of a range of accountability mechanisms that apply to all levels of government elsewhere in the nation.

This is the first of two reports on the governance and financial sustainability of Norfolk Island. A second report, covering financial sustainability measures, will be issued by the Committee next year.

The Committee makes 32 recommendations in this report, on governance issues. It strongly suggests that the financial and administrative burden of implementing the report's recommendations fall primarily on the Federal Government and **not** the Norfolk Island Government and community.

Tabling the report, External Territories Committee Chairman Senator Ross Lightfoot said: "We recommend the Commonwealth bear the cost of these reforms – as it should given the nature of the difficulties facing the Norfolk Island community and the Commonwealth's role and responsibilities for that community.

"Australia's interest in facilitating good governance throughout the Pacific must mean that all appropriate steps be taken to ensure that these same principles of good governance protect those who live in a part of Australia that is located in the Pacific."

**The report recommends that the continuation of self-government for Norfolk Island be conditional on the timely implementation of the specific external mechanisms of accountability and reforms to the political system recommended by the Committee.**

These external accountability mechanisms include:

- Oversight of governmental conduct by the **Commonwealth Ombudsman**;
- Financial and performance audits by the **Commonwealth Auditor-General**;
- Oversight of elections by the **Australian Electoral Commission**;
- Extending the jurisdiction of the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption (**ICAC**) to Norfolk Island; and
- The application of Freedom of Information and Whistleblower legislation.

The reforms to the Norfolk Island political system include:

- All meetings of the Legislative Assembly to be publicised in advance and held in public (except on matters relating to employment conditions of public officers);
- Adoption of a Code of Conduct for members of the Assembly;
- Establishing a register of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests for members of the Assembly;
- The Chief Minister being elected from members of the Assembly, with the right to appoint three Ministers from the remaining members of the Assembly;
- The appointment of an independent Speaker and Deputy Speaker by the Island Administrator, on the advice of the Federal Minister for Territories;
- The establishment of a Norfolk Island Assembly Standing Committee to Review Government Expenditure; and
- Four year terms (with the possibility of the Assembly being dissolved in the fourth year, if two-thirds of the Assembly agree).

Other key recommendations of the report include:

- That the Federal Government remove Norfolk Island's current powers with respect to immigration;

- The extension of the Model Criminal Code with respect to corruption to Norfolk Island;
- The Federal Government review and assess the level of income support and health and medical assistance on Norfolk Island with a view to ensuring parity with entitlements paid to Australian citizens and residents on the mainland. In particular, the Federal Government should consider resuming responsibility for social security and extend Medicare and the PBS to Norfolk Island; and
- That Norfolk Island be included in the Federal electorate of Canberra for the purposes of voting in Federal elections and referendums, and that this be made compulsory for all eligible Norfolk Island residents.

The report also recommends that the Federal Government comprehensively reassess its current policies with respect to Norfolk Island, with a view to establishing a clear set of policy goals and framework for achieving them. This will include a comprehensive needs analysis regarding Island services and their financing. Norfolk Islanders are currently excluded from most Commonwealth programmes and services because they pay no Commonwealth taxation.

According to Senator Lightfoot, "The overwhelmingly evidence, from this inquiry and previous inquiries that this Committee and others have conducted, is that Norfolk Island is in deep and growing trouble and needs help. In order to ensure that real and meaningful reform does take place, the Committee has chosen to deliver an unambiguous report that provides the catalyst and framework for reform to begin."

"The Committee is in no doubt that the majority of the community are peaceful and law abiding, hardworking, conscientious, possessing a strong sense of civic duty and with an inherent ethic of supporting those in the community who may be less well off."

"Yet, evidence available to the Committee points to the fact that elements within the community are able to exploit the current governance system, with its lack of effective checks and balances, for their own ends."

"It has become increasingly clear that beneath the surface, informal mechanisms can and do operate with relative impunity. Based on the evidence presented to it, the Committee has grave concerns that a culture of fear and intimidation has taken root on the Island to the detriment of the majority of the community."

It is alleged, for example, that:

- acts of arson and physical assault have been used to pressure some residents to leave the Island;
- arson has been used to destroy property to gain financial advantage or cover up illegal dealings;
- instances of misuse and abuse of political power are commonplace; and
- interference with mail, e-mail and monitoring of telephones and other more subtle forms of intimidation have allegedly been used against people perceived as questioning the conduct of public affairs or who simply disturb the status quo of Island life.

"There will be a vocal, self-interested minority that will criticise the Committee's efforts and attempt to stifle considered debate on the recommendations," Senator Lightfoot said.

"Those opposed to real reform on the Island will endeavour to stymie any attempts at reform. The Committee expects that this minority group will organise a petition condemning the report and initiate a referendum to demonstrate popular opposition to Federal Government 'interference' in the affairs of Norfolk Island. The Committee, however, has serious concerns with the practices associated with the conduct of petitions and referendums on Norfolk Island.

"There will be those who seek to ensure this report joins the long list of other reports by Federal and Norfolk Island inquiries that have never been implemented and which now gather dust. If they succeed, the Committee will have wasted its time and that of the Island community, the cause of genuine reform on Norfolk Island will be set back irrevocably and the future of the Island community seriously undermined."

**For media comment, please contact Senator Ross Lightfoot,  
Chairman, National Capital and External Territories Committee, on (02) 6277 3626**

The full report can be found at the Committee's website at:  
[www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ncet/NorfolkGov/index.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ncet/NorfolkGov/index.htm)

For further information, please contact the Inquiry Secretary, Mr Quinton Clements,  
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