



## SHIRE OF CHRISTMAS ISLAND

### SUBMISSION TO JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AND EXTERNAL TERRITORIES

The following provides background information on selected matters for discussion by the Shire of Christmas Island with the Committee.

#### **1. Road Funding Arrangements**

**Exec Summary** – Allow decisions on road funding to be made locally on the island with greater authority for such decisions to be vested in the Administrator. A three to five year funding program for roads would provide a more streamlined roads funding process.

#### **Details**

Each year the Shire receives funding from the Commonwealth for the maintenance and improvement of its road network. This funding has three distinct functions:

**Central Road Authority Grant** provides funding for the general maintenance of Commonwealth owned public roads. These roads are essentially the “Main Roads” of the island and include the road to the resort and to the IDC. The contributed value of this grant for the 11/12 year was approx \$708,000.

**Non Capital Grant** provides funding for some maintenance activities shared between Commonwealth and Local Roads such as line marking and funding for training and technical enhancement of the Shires road network and traffic management. 11/12 contribution was approximately \$157,000.

**Capital Grant** provides funding for specific capital works activities on local and Commonwealth roads such as the construction of new roads, resealing, re-sheeting and the construction of road user facilities such as car parking. 11/12 contribution was approximately \$20,000.

The important point to note in the above is the capital grant value paid. The approved grant for the 11/12 was approximately \$1.6M. Approximately \$1.1M of this was for projects not completed in previous financial years. The 11/12 approved funding was not confirmed to the Shire until approximately January 2012.

Councils issue is not with the funding amount, its makeup or conditions. Our issue is simply with the funding approval process and the lateness of the advice we receive on the approved funding. The following summarises the funding approval for the last three financial years:

- 12/13 funding remains unconfirmed as at 22 October 2012;

- 11/12 funding was confirmed January 2012 and;
- 10/11 funding was confirmed November 2010

Seasonal constraints restrict major road works operations to the period of approximately April to November each year. Late wet seasons or early crab migrations can restrict this window further.

Each year the Shire are advised that funding for works not completed by 30 June must be included in our bid for the next years funding (which is done) however as this subsequent year is not approved until approximately December, the main construction window is missed.

The Shire is encouraged by discussions with the Department to formalise a funding agreement over a longer period of time (say 3-5 years) for its roads program however to date no formal advice on progress of this matter has been received.

The Shire has no objection to an annual funding program however confirmation of the funding must be received no later than 1 July in order to allow construction windows to be maximised. Generally however, the Shire believes that decisions on funding should be able to be made locally and the most appropriate authority is the Ministers representative, the Administrator.

## **2. Dual Use Pathways Project**

**Exec Summary** – Continue commitment to fund the development of Dual Use Pathways network on the Island.

### **Details**

Funding for dual use pathways of \$3M over three years was announced in late 2008. Delays in finalising the funding arrangements and planning resulted in work not commencing on actual construction until early 2012. A section of pathway approximately 800 metres long joining an existing path to the school was completed.

At present, the Shire needs to finalise its business case for the next stage of the pathway network however the Shire has significant concerns that the commitment of this funding is weakened due to the current Commonwealth budget position.

Even if the funding was provided over a longer period of time (say 5 years) this would be more favourable than removing the overall commitment to the project.

## **3. Road Network Improvement**

**Exec Summary** – Fund sealing of the road to the IDC as a matter of priority. Fund the progressive resealing of the existing sealed network using mainland standard aggregate materials on all major roads. Fund the gradual sealing of all the major unsealed roads on Christmas Island.

## Details

The Christmas Island road network consists of approximately 40km of sealed roads and 110km of unsealed roads.

There has been a significant increase in traffic across the whole network generally and in particular on the road to the detention centre at North West Point. Traffic count results show vehicle numbers on NW Point Road increasing from approximately 60 vehicles per day in 2004 to 400 per day in 2012. On the section of Murray road to the IDC, numbers have increased from 85 vehicles per day in 2001 to 510 vehicles per day in 2012.

The road to the detention centre consists of approximately 10.7km of unsealed road. Maintenance requirements are high, particularly during rain periods and at times a grader is virtually required full time on Murray and NW Point Road. Despite this, road condition is not always able to be maintained to a level of service that is expected and other roads also suffer due to the unbalanced allocation of resources to the IDC route.

Council's principal on the sealing of the road to the detention centre is very simple. Council argues that a private development at NW Point of an equivalent size to the detention facilities would undoubtedly have required as part of a Local Government development approval and planning process construction of a sealed road to service it (as did the Casino). There is no valid reason why the continued use of the IDC should not attract a similar requirement and yet there appears to be no plan in place for the sealing of the road, despite the IDC being fully operational since around January 2009.

A feasibility study by the Commonwealth into the sealing of the road was completed in 2011. Council has the resources necessary to carry out the sealing works and a program of funding for the sealing of the road over say 3-5 years would have significant local benefits in addition to the improvement in serviceability of the centre.

On the remainder of the road network, the average age of the bitumen seals on CI roads is approximately 11 years. The majority of these roads are sealed with a locally produced limestone aggregate. Whilst marginally acceptable on local low volume streets, this aggregate is not suitable for any road which carries heavy vehicles. This stone wears rapidly and within a period of anything from 2-8 years, resealing is required due to the roads no longer providing adequate skid resistance.

A granite (or similar) road sealing aggregate is required to improve the safety of our major roads. Council is in the process of importing approximately 1700 Tonnes of granite aggregate for a resealing program however a commitment of funding to reseal roads over the next 3-5 years is required. It should be noted that almost half of the sealed roads with below standard aggregate are Commonwealth roads.

Finally, a sealed "ring road" around the island (Murray Road, East West Baseline Road and North South Baseline Road and North West Point Road)

providing quality year round road access to the detention facility and visitor/tourism sites would contribute significantly to the longer term economic development of the island. This network improvement needs to take into consideration specific elements to manage the red crab migration such as crab crossings and/or crab bridges and crab fencing.

#### **4. Internet and Mobile Communications**

**Exec Summary** – A commitment to upgrade internet and mobile telecommunications services is required to support development of Christmas Island.

##### **Details**

The existing internet service on the island places limits the ability of business and government to operate effectively in today's multi media rich environment. Simply searching for products and accessing services online can be a frustrating and time consuming process. As more and more services are being based online and consumers are encouraged (and sometimes required) to use online services, the demand on the islands systems increase, often beyond capacity.

One of the great potential abilities of the internet is to link remote communities with the full range of services available in more populated areas. At present, this ability is not being realised for the Christmas Island Community.

As an example, the Commonwealth has recently upgraded the computer system in the Motor Vehicle Registry which is operated by the Shire. This upgraded service links to WA Department of Transport databases on the mainland. However to date, there has been significant frustration and delays to customers due to the speed and reliability of the data link.

Mobile communications is becoming the norm and improvements in service delivery and productivity both in the private and public sectors could be achieved through an upgrade to the Christmas Island mobile communications network.

As an example, the Shire and a number of Commonwealth service functions on island has recently installed the same asset management and maintenance system. One key feature of this system is the ability to take the management system mobile with a potential to improve delivery of maintenance services and ultimately, improve the quality and lifespan of community assets. However the existing mobile phone network simply does not have the capability to support these system features which limits the ability of the system to reach its fullest potential.