

# **Inquiry into the changing economic environment in the Indian Ocean Territories**

## **QUESTIONS ON NOTICE FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP**

Senator the Hon Alan Ferguson asks:

- 1. How much local employment is generated by the operation of the Immigration Reception and Processing Centre?**
  - a. In regard to general positions either occupied or vacant, how many are (i) full time positions, (ii) part time and (iii) casual?**

Answer

Previously, on 9 September 2009, the Committee was advised there were about 97 locals supporting business activity at all DIAC facilities at Christmas Island. Since then due to recent increased business activity the numbers of locals engaged has increased. The number of general positions (local) currently supporting business activity at all DIAC facilities at Christmas Island comprises 45 full time staff and 63 casuals. There are no part time staff.

- b. What level of skill is required to fill positions and are these skills available locally? If not, where are most positions recruited from?**

Answer

Skill levels required for most positions are at the trade certificate or lower. Some staff meet skill requirements through a mix of on-the-job training and in-house training programs.

The labour market at Christmas Island lacks various technical skills such as trained security technicians, IT support, cooks and maintenance contractors. Skilled contractors in these areas are recruited on the mainland.

- Is the number of people employed expected to change, and if so, what are the factors that are expected to attribute to the change?**

Answer

At this point in time business activity is high and the outcome of recent recruitment initiatives at Christmas Island indicate the pool of skilled and unskilled workers is now very low. If business activity decreases it is expected there will be a fall off in labour demand.

2. **Has a cost estimate been undertaken on the impact on the local economy of the operation of the Christmas Island Immigration Reception and Processing Centre? If so, what were the results?**

Answer

There has been no modelling work undertaken in this area.

3. **What are the main economic challenges facing the (a) current and (b) future operation of the Immigration Reception and Processing Centre?**

Answer

Christmas Island remains the offshore point of processing for irregular maritime arrivals and the key current and future economic challenges are.

- The need to ensure efficient logistics in relation to the movement of move people on and off the island as well as the supply of goods and services to the Island. Related expenses such a freight costs need to be effectively managed.
- Ongoing provision of local labour supply on the Island and the overall impact of future fluctuations in irregular maritime arrivals on labour market conditions.
- The existence of adequate infrastructure on the Island to support a substantially increased Island population. This includes roads, waste management and wharf facilities.
- Efficient use of DIAC and contractor staff will ensure the length of stay for people in detention is minimised. This will naturally decrease the resources required to support these arrangements.
- DIAC will continue to use all opportunities to manage operational resources efficiently including: efficient fleet management, energy management and opening and closing facilities when needed (being responsive to shifts in demand).
- Use of DIAC owned accommodation is a significant cost offset to total operational costs.

4. **How does the *Environment Protection Biodiversity and Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) apply to the Christmas Island Immigration Reception and Processing Centre?**

A report commissioned by the Director of National Parks to the Department of Finance and Deregulation in September 2008 titled; *Christmas Island Biodiversity Monitoring Program: December 2003 to April 2007* has provided a framework and guide to the ongoing impact of the operations of the facility.

In the main concerns about the impact of noise from increased traffic near the Settlement, dust on roads, disposal of waste oil and construction waste, pollution of groundwater and receiving waters from hazardous substances spillage, disturbance to crabs, disturbance to birds, disturbance to flora and fauna; and the spread of invasive species have been the focus of the Department.

**5. What issues or challenges have been encountered in applying the EPBC Act to the Christmas Island Immigration Reception and Processing Centre and what steps are being taken to address any problems encountered with application of the EPBC Act?**

Recommendations to mitigate the ongoing environmental impacts of the facility are being taken into consideration through the development of a new Environmental Management Plan (EMP) in conjunction with the DIAC's new detention service provider – SERCO.

The Department currently briefs all new staff to the facility and the island in regard to the environmental issues of the continued operations of its facilities including the self imposed road speed restriction of 60 kilometres per hour regardless of the higher posted limits that can be found on the island.

Mitigation strategies have been developed and remain in place to ensure the impact of ongoing activities are minimised in the areas of the protection of foraging habitats, minimising the road mortality of Robber Crabs and Red Crabs, minimising the road mortality of birds and the disturbances of the forest along the National Park boundaries.

The Department also has a regime in place to ensure the effective management of weeds at its facilities and stormwater controls to prevent run-off into the surrounding national parks. Efforts are also being made to limit vehicle use through the National Park by using buses to transport staff to and from work and between facilities.

More recently DIAC is considering the management of its green waste and recyclable waste. Consideration is being given to working with the Shire to set up waste recycling capability and potentially ship recyclable waste to the mainland inside empty containers rather than send it to less environmentally options such as landfill.