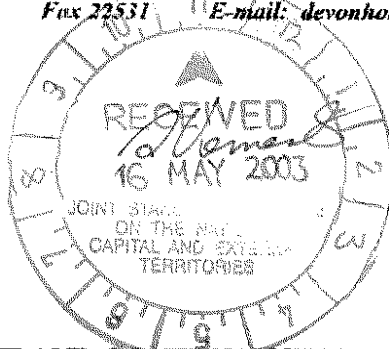


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Senator Ross Lightfoot
Chairman
Norfolk Island Governance Inquiry



16th May 2003

SUBMISSION 16

Dear Sir,

RE: NORFOLK ISLAND GOVERNANCE INQUIRY

Thank you for your invitation to make a submission to the Norfolk Governance Inquiry.

Unfortunately, family holiday arrangements prevented us from making this submission by your advertised closing date for written submissions. We are, however, very anxious to make our views known to your committee. We respectfully request that this letter be included in the body of your evidence.

Firstly, we wish to make it very clear that the task of assessing the issues affecting Governance on Norfolk Island is the role of the elected Norfolk Island Government alone, and not any outside body. We do not believe that members of an Australian Senate Committee has the necessary understanding of the Norfolk Island character, culture and historical background to make any sort of valid assessment of the island's needs, or even to ask the right questions.

It is our perception that the Minister for Territories has a pre-conceived agenda in directing your committee to make findings, and that part of that agenda is to force our island to fit into a neat Canberra-type beaurocratic pigeonhole. Norfolk Island is an anomaly in the eyes of successive Australian governments, and we are happy for it to remain so, because our whole history and roots are very different from those of mainland Australia. We do not even fit neatly into the spectrum of Australia's diverse ethnic groups. We did not have our beginnings in Australia, and have never chosen to migrate there. We have only become Australians by default, as it were. We have many people on Norfolk Island who do not even hold Australian citizenship, but have been accepted fully by this community and have made a significant contribution. Now your government is suggesting that such people should be denied the right to fully participate in the affairs and government of the island. In whose interest is this? Certainly not Norfolk Island's.

We appreciate that the stated rationale behind much of your government's interest in Norfolk Island is the desire to see that Norfolk Island citizens enjoy the same rights as people living in "other parts of Australia." We do not believe that for these purposes, we should be treated as part of Australia, but rather as a self-governing territory. The argument is also often used, particularly by the present Minister for Territories, of the need for Australia to fulfil its obligations under the United Nations. We are very conscious of the fact that Australia has indeed denied us justice by blocking our attempts to have our true status clarified by the United Nations. The unspoken agenda behind Australia's wishing to retain a tight control over Norfolk Island affairs is undoubtedly "Australia's national interest." Unfortunately for us, it seems that this will always override the interests of Norfolk Island.

If our community is to be compared to any community of a similar size and comparable isolation on mainland Australia, I believe it would be impossible to come to any conclusion other than that we enjoy a far superior standard of living, infrastructure, and health and educational facilities. Additionally, we enjoy an enormous pride in our community, and the fact that we have been running our own affairs in a democratic and responsible way far longer than Australia has.

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It is our belief that constant inquiries and investigations into Norfolk Island affairs have been counter-productive to good government on Norfolk. The time and resources of our own Legislative Assembly are constantly consumed with dealing with these inquiries, making the necessary submissions, and having to justify its position and actions. This time and money would have been far better spent on dealing with the real needs of the people on Norfolk Island. We are quite capable, if left alone, of having a *sustainable* system of government, and one that is *accountable* - to the Norfolk Island electorate, and not to the powers in Canberra.

Because our people are intrinsically polite and courteous, and optimistic by nature, we have dared to hope that by explaining our unique Norfolk values and priorities time and time again, as well as extending proper Norfolk Island hospitality to committees such as yours, the Australian government and beaurocracy may eventually come to some proper appreciation and understanding of our situation. However, we fear that this is not the case. Successive Ministers, governments and committees continue to come up with new ideas of what *they* consider to be in our best interests.

Please - we want to be friends with Australia, and work alongside you. We share many common values. We are grateful for your advice and help, such as would be given to any small Pacific Island community. However, we plead with you to let us get on with the job of governing our own island. Stop blocking our own initiatives to employ local people, as with the Greenwich University affair. Encourage us in our own initiatives to raise revenues and be financially self-supporting. Give us back control of our lands- and our seas. Try to give us some encouragement and to share our pride in our unique identity and in what we, as a small community, have achieved.

Yours sincerely

Mary Christian-Bailey

Bernie and Mary Christian-Bailey