

Dr Candice Snell BVSc (Hons)

14<sup>th</sup> April 2010

Joint Standing Committee on the  
National Capital and External Territories  
Department of the House of Representatives  
Ph: (02) 6277 2022

**JSC Submission – Meeting Attended on the 8<sup>th</sup> April 2010**

The following concerns were raised at the meeting:

1. There was no open discussion with our Legislative assembly members prior to the release of the exposure draft regarding the appropriateness of the proposed legislation.
2. I believe the bill, in regards to governance changes – is not about increased accountability and transparency but a significant reduction in the power of the legislative assembly to legislate at the local level in a timely and appropriate manner.
3. No justification for the governance changes has been provided – No-one has been able to give me an example of a situation where inappropriate changes were made to legislation in regards to Schedule 2 matters. Further to this I ask how could a Commonwealth minister possibly have more knowledge than our local assembly on matters such as our local radio station, livestock control and the cemetery, only to name a few.  
As the Norfolk Island Act stands it allows us to legislate on island on matters most relevant to the everyday running of the island. We have 9 elected members – not a single council member or minister who decides – our legislative matters are discussed both by the Assembly members and any proposed amendments or inclusions are made public via radio. Surely this is a great enough transparency.
4. Financial matters – Rather than remove some of the powers of the local Finance minister, surely it would be more appropriate to have the Commonwealth Auditor to audit our financial decision making together with the current independent auditor, thus continuing to allow our Finance minister to do the job he was elected to do.
5. Removal of Schedule 7 – if we are looking at increased transparency, surely all legislative members, where appropriate, may be given the opportunity to attend executive meetings.

I would also like to elaborate on some of the issues put to me during the meeting regarding the Health Services provided on the island and Norfolk Island's ability to survive financially into the future

**Health Services, Child Welfare Officer and Mental Health Officer**

Norfolk Island is second to none in regards to the health services it provides on island for a population of 2000 people.

We have a

- 24 bed hospital
- 3 doctors – with surgical, anaesthetic and obstetric qualifications
- Maternity Ward
- Full time Radiologist
- Full time Dentist
- Full time Pathologist
- Full time Physiotherapist and part time exercise therapist who works with both physio clients as well as our Aged care residents
- Emille Channer nurse – home visits for our elderly which will be further developed in 2010
- Regular visits from Specialists (e.g. Gastroenterologist, Podiatrist, Dermatologist, Urologist)
- Maternity facilities – both able to handle natural and caesarian section deliveries.
- Anti-Natal classes and ‘Baby Clinic’ 3 days per week run by a registered nurse.
- Full time counselor

The Child Welfare officer’s position has been advertised and the Director of the hospital informs me there are a number of suitable applicants which will be decided within the next few weeks. This officer will liaise with our counselor and provide greater resources for the islands youth

There is currently a mental health advocate appointed under the Mental Health Act – David McCowan – registered nurse (and hospital director)

The counselor also has frequent debriefing sessions with a Psychiatrist in Australia. Our aim (as I am also a member of the Hospital board) within the next few months is to further develop associations with a Psychiatrist in Western Australia via video links. This gives patients the opportunity for further counseling sessions beyond the local counselor and for a second opinion for both the local counselor and for patients. This would be available to all patients with mental health issues or otherwise. It must be reminded that there is no other remote rural community in Australia with a similar population which can boast the range of services the NI Hospital provides

### **Financial Situation and our ability to Fund ourselves into the Future without Australian Intervention**

Norfolk Island has been able to manage its finances for the past 31 years under the Norfolk Island Act – through good times and bad. This past 18 months to 2 years has been extremely difficult for all countries throughout the world in regards to the Global Financial Crisis – Norfolk Island has not been immune to this, especially given our largest market are retirees who are often living on pensions and superannuation savings. Our current tourism numbers are around 27,000. The Econtech report in 2009 (Norfolk Island Government Financial Situation:Update) states that ‘even under a baseline (or conservative) tourism recovery path, the average shortfall is expected to almost disappear, with a shortfall of only \$0.1 million estimated on average over the next three years to 2011/12’ - thus if we are able to boost our tourism numbers to 2007/8 numbers ( 35,400) then we should have no issue in having adequate finances to run the island sustainably.

Given this I believe with appropriate fiscal management, with the further utilization of the new SPIN fibre optic network, regaining tourists lost in the financial crisis and finding new sources of tourism dollar – such as can be found in the recent agreement with P&O Cruise ships, we can continue to finance our island now and into the future.

As a final comment I would like you to appreciate how good so many of our services are here on the island. Under the Australian Taxation system, I have not been able to find ONE community of our similar population (including small islands such as King Island and Christmas Island) in which you can do the following:

- Send your children to the local school for year 11 and 12
- Have your children (natural or caesarian) in the local hospital
- Undertake surgical procedures greater than minor injuries/ procedures or simple fractures in the local hospital
- Know that every dollar I contribute to government tourism expenditure goes directly towards enhancing the local tourist numbers and the Norfolk Island experience.

These are a few examples of features I believe are extremely important to preserve in our community, and makes us the community we are.

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