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The Enquiry Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories
Department of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Sirs and Mesdames,

The implication inherent in the terms of reference of this latest in the seemingly endless parade of Australian Federal Parliamentary committees, commissions and enquiries is transparently simple: they say, in effect, that Norfolk Island's own Government is incapable of running Norfolk Island. The basis for this contention is not stated, nor is it borne out by the fact that, in the face of mighty Canberra cannons pounding away at our so-called self-government since it was unilaterally introduced in 1979, Norfolk Island is still electing its Parliament and its Government. That Norfolk Island may be bloodied, but remains unbowed.

A truly caring and benevolent colonial overlord would not have adopted the destructive and biased attitude that perpetually emanates from Canberra. Please note my use of the word "Canberra" – I would not presume to insult the People of the Commonwealth of Australia by using any other word. It is the only accurate word.

Committees like this new one attack their commission with their minds already made up and their reports already mentally written because they have already received their instructions and had better obey them if they want more parliamentary perks. Undue credence will be apportioned to the minority statements by local residents such as Mr. Mike King, Mr. Ivens Buffett, Mr. Graeme Woolley and the Usual Suspects. Whereas testimony by the majority, which includes representatives of the Pitcairn Descendants, will

be played down. "Irrelevant" is such a convenient word! And the Committee's report will be issued with a fetchingly cute, witty title that the Committee Secretary will chuckle about as he dreams it up; after which yet another misleading, intrinsically false document will go on the shelves behind the External Territories desk, there to moulder among the plethora of others.

These "investigative" committees mean **nothing**. The decisions have already been made. They are simply a way that Australian Federal Parliamentarians can tuck a bit extra in their pay packets and have nice little jaunts.

I put this to you, sirs and mesdames of this latest committee in the long line: that we of Norfolk Island **do not elect you**; that the Australian Federal Minister of Territories **is not elected by us**; and that your bureaucracy is in the service of persons we of Norfolk Island **do not elect**. Nor do we want to elect you. We do not want a colonial overlord, especially one so overbearing.

I call Canberra a "colonial overlord" because it is really no different from H.M. George III's Government when Boston held a tea party. A colonial overlord exerts authority in a place that does not elect it. I also quote the Duke of Richmond, speaking in the House of Lords in 1775: "No people can ever be made to submit to a form of government they say they will not receive." The history of Norfolk Island since 1856 has consistently been averse to integration into the Commonwealth of Australia, and that has not changed. It is time the Commonwealth bit the bullet.

I waited out my time — seven years, actually — until I was enfranchised in Norfolk Island by dint of Residency. I was happy to wait. It takes time to know this unique place. A lot of time. Only its indigenes, the Pitcairn Descendants, partake of its spiritual lifeblood, but after five years in residence, we expatriates have learned enough to vote. Until five years have elapsed, we have **not** learned enough to vote. No matter how large the Canberra presence looms here, it operates in ignorance of Norfolk Island's essence, and has wrought untold harm upon Norfolk Island's integrity. Canberra is a child pulling the wings off the world's last specimen of a particular butterfly.

If Canberra left Norfolk Island alone to raise revenues in

the ways other Pacific island nations do, it would have no trouble maintaining financial solvency. But Canberra **says** that it can tell Norfolk Island what it can or cannot do in everything from the raising of its revenues to what should be an absolutely local activity - local elections. I say that Canberra has no right to exert these autocratic powers. Norfolk Island is a **homeland**, not a piece of real estate. Its people are entitled to govern themselves according to their own lights.

I am an Australian born and bred. I hold no other citizenship. I am an ardent Australian patriot. I am an Australian Living National Treasure. I have worked very hard for Australia over the years. When I sign books in Helsinki, the queue goes around the block. You cannot dismiss me as an Australian. You cannot dismiss me as a yokel. And, after my death, this and other letters will be published for a worldwide audience. Therefore you cannot dismiss me as unimportant.

But what Canberra (not the Australian people!) has done and continues to do to Norfolk Island **shames me as a loyal Australian**. The only way this isolated little place can thrive is by keeping its own identity. The alternative is what happened to poor Christmas Island, reduced to a shire council that is convenient for Canberra to use from time to time, but has no rights for its native people and no say in its destiny. If Norfolk Island were to suffer the same fate as Christmas Island, then the Federal Government of that moment elected by the Australian people would not be worthy of the Australian people, who believe in a fair go.

We of Norfolk Island are treated by Canberra with arrogance, lack of compassion, wilful misunderstanding, toplofty superiority, and a degree of hardheartedness tantamount to cruelty. Canberra ignores our local referendums, which reflect the views of the majority of the people of Norfolk Island; Canberra blocks our efforts to be self-sustaining; and Canberra is now embarking upon a undemocratic, biased and discriminatory local electoral program that is aimed at reducing Norfolk Island to a shire council, shorn of its last vestige of autonomy, stripped of its right to manage its own affairs for the wellbeing of Norfolk Island, nowhere else. There is no place within the Commonwealth of Australia that has

things in common with Norfolk Island, from our part-Polynesian enclave comprising 47% of the populace to our factional politics to our unique way of looking at the world.

As an Australian, I ask Canberra to change its longstanding policy towards Norfolk Island. To accord its native people their inalienable rights. To grant true self-government. To **help** us, rather than hinder us. Canberra should be putting its hands on Norfolk Island with respect, with understanding, with compassion, with humanitarian motives. If this latest Committee continues with the standover tactics, arrogance and discriminatory bias that **all** its predecessors have, then it will have accomplished nothing worth remembering. It will be yet one more ugly blur on Australia's escutcheon.

It affords me no pleasure to speak so harshly, but I cannot lie down voiceless under the same old Canberra policy of unilateral authoritarianism and thoughtless tunnel vision. I am aware that no one in Canberra will take any notice of what I say. But say it, I will.

If what Canberra wants is the oil and gas out there in Norfolk Island's territorial waters, then well and good. Let Canberra take them. And don't say they're not there. They are – anyone with real computer talent can find loads of evidence on the Web, despite the closed sites originating in Canberra.

I say again, if oil and gas are the prizes, take them. But compensate Norfolk Island according to its rights under the umbrella of an ostensibly democratic nation, the Commonwealth of Australia. Let us fund ourselves properly. Let us conduct our local affairs as we wish, free of the omnipresent fear that next week or next month or next year, Canberra will take our rights away. And let all the local residents who want to live inside the Commonwealth go back there. We certainly won't miss them.

A handwritten signature in black ink, enclosed in a hand-drawn oval. The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized script and reads "Colleen McCullough Robinson".

Colleen McCullough Robinson