

SUBMISSION

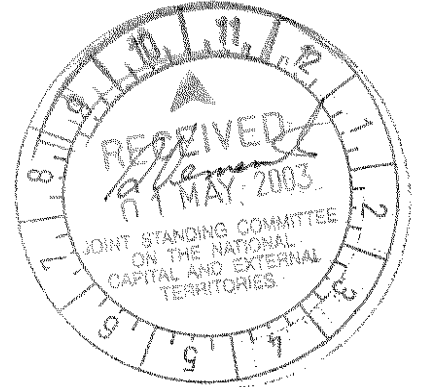
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Norfolk Island

24th April, 2003

FILE COPY



To: The Inquiry Secretary,
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital
and External Territories,
Department of the House of Representatives,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA ACT 2600

From: Bruce Griffiths, Norfolk Island Resident,
1964/2003

Subject: Submission to above committee

The paragraph below is an extract from a submission of the Norfolk Island Government to the Australian Constitutional Commission 19th November, 1987.

“For over 130 years the people of Norfolk Island have been subject to the authority of overseas Governments and legislatures. There have been periods of almost complete autonomy, and periods of rule of a quasi-colonial type. At times the Island has been considered to be a colony or dependency, at others a part of the metropolitan country. The mainland tide has ebbd and flowed. One thing is common. At all times during the years since 1856 – when the people of Pitcairn Island first settled on Norfolk – the final power to control even the smallest detail of village-level administration has resided elsewhere. The submissions in this paper are an attempt to establish a balance, to confirm to the metropolitan country what should rightfully be hers in the interests of all, but to achieve constitutional guarantees for an appropriate level of self-government in the Island. These are necessary to preserve its sense of identity, to give it reasonable protection from political forces in which it has no part and over which it has no control and to foster measured and sensible progress towards self-responsibility.”

So nothing has changed, just more of the same.

I personally do not question Australia's sovereignty and authority to rule over Norfolk Island under Section 122 of the Australian Constitution. For our common good and sufficient geopolitical reasons it is in all our interests for Australia to continue to rule. What I question in this submission is the clumsy and inept way Australia goes about it.

In the published statement in the NORFOLK ISLANDER, April 5, 2003 (attached), headed "HAVE YOUR SAY ON HOW TO IMPROVE GOVERNANCE ON NORFOLK ISLAND" you ask a series of questions and list TERMS OF REFERENCE that apart from being culturally and historically insensitive display all the hubris and arrogance of a 19th century colonial power. What happened to the enlightened statesmanship of the 1979 Norfolk Island Act. What happened to the promises and mutual goodwill expressed in that Act. Did it all become too hard? Did you actually think that when you handed over to us in 1979, nearly all the powers of FEDERAL, STATE and LOCAL GOVERNMENT, with very few restrictions, that we wouldn't have problems and difficulties. Did you actually think that with a population of under 2000 people and an electoral roll of less than 1200 to choose nine people, good and true, for an Assembly with no experience in government, thanks to our colonial past, that it would be easy.

It is not easy, and no thanks to you. During the sixty-five years from 1914 to 1979 of your administration, you spent the bare minimum. You didn't seal our roads – we did. You didn't buy our electricity generators – we did. You didn't reticulate our power – we did. You didn't educate our children – we did. You didn't maintain our hospital and maintain our people's health – we did. You didn't pay for our pharmaceuticals – we did. I could go on, but what's the point, you are not listening are you? Was all this just an experiment at our expense. Was all this about looking good at South Pacific Commission meetings while at the same time shutting us out. You could have made us into Australia's shop window into the Pacific, but you didn't – we did through our own efforts. You could have been helpful instead of a hindrance with your committees for this and committees for that. Endlessly harassing like a fussy old nanny instead of a wise old uncle. Just think about these things. We have no child living in poverty, can you say the same. We care for our elderly and sick, can you say the same. We have no queues for medical attention, either here or on the mainland, can you say the same. We have no unemployment, can you say the same. We have no people wasting their lives on the dole, can you say the same. In some years two-thirds of year 12 students go onto some form of tertiary education, can you say the same. We have very little serious crime and people are very rarely in jail, can you say the same. We have no squabbling political parties whom from this distance seem to have the main objective of seeking and keeping power. What we do have instead, is CITIZENS INITIATED REFERENDA, a form of genuine participatory democracy and freedom that is probably unfamiliar to you.

I have recently served on a group (Focus 2002) looking into the finances of the Island so I am well aware where we are starting to fail. We do need a broader based tax system, a self-funded contributory Island wide superannuation scheme, better political control over major expenditure. We do need a voting system less prone to manipulation than the present Illinois cumulative voting system foisted on us by the Commonwealth against our wishes in the 1980's.

We do need to make provision to fix our roads, wharfs, and other capital works and perhaps someday a new hospital.

What we don't need is you telling us what we do need. You pretend to have all the answers to all our problems when quite clearly, you don't have the answers to your own. When we need your help we will ask for it and as Australian citizens, expect it, and we are willing to pay for it.

Should the Committee visit Norfolk Island in the course of their inquiry, I would like to have the opportunity to deliver these comments in person.



Bruce Griffiths

copies to Chief Minister, Norfolk Island Government and
Administrator, Norfolk Island

Have your say on how to improve Governance on Norfolk Island

The Federal Parliament's External Territories Committee has been asked by the Federal Minister for Territories to look into potential ways of improving governance on Norfolk Island.

How can the operations and organisation of the Territory Ministry and the Legislature on Norfolk Island be improved? Should there be direct elections for the position of Chief Minister? Should there be fixed terms? Are there other changes which should be made to how government on Norfolk Island operates and is delivered to the Island community and residents?

All these questions are being asked with a particular emphasis on the need for achieving a financially sustainable and accountable system of representative self-government in the Territory.

The Committee wishes to hear the views and suggestions of individuals and organisations on Norfolk Island, and is seeking written submissions by **Friday 2nd May 2003**.

Written submissions, addressing any or all of the full terms of reference (which appear below) can be sent to the Committee at:

The Inquiry Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories
Department of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

For further information about the inquiry or making a submission, please contact the Committee Secretariat on 0061 2 6277 4355 or via email at jscncet@aph.gov.au, or visit the Committee's website at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ncet/index.htm

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Federal Minister for Territories asks that the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories report on measures to improve the operations and organisation of the Territory Ministry and Legislature on Norfolk Island, with particular emphasis on the need for a financially sustainable and accountable system of representative self-government in the Territory.

The inquiry should consider possible alternative measures, such as:

- a) Direct elections for the position of Chief Minister; and
- b) Fixed terms of government.

These matters should be considered in the context of the financial sustainability of self-government arrangements on Norfolk Island, with particular consideration of -

- a) the findings of the Commonwealth Grants Commission documented in its 1997 report on Norfolk Island on the Territory's capacity to administer and fund obligations associated with:
 - current and future government functions and responsibilities;
 - the Island's current and foreseeable infrastructure requirements;
 - the provision of government services on Norfolk Island at an appropriate level;
- b) subsequent government and parliamentary reports relevant to the above; and
- c) the role of the Commonwealth and its responsibilities for Norfolk Island as part of remote and regional Australia.

BACKGROUND

The Joint Standing Committee is a parliamentary committee made up of members of the Federal House of Representatives and the Senate. It was established by Federal Parliament to inquire into matters concerning the Australian Capital Territory, the Antarctic, and the Island Territories, including Christmas Island, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Norfolk Island. Part of its role is to monitor governance in these Australian Territories to ensure that appropriate and effective government services and programs are provided to Territory communities and residents.

The Terms of Reference listed above reflect the fact that the Committee has an interest in how government is being delivered to Norfolk Island's residents and in how the Island's economic and social development is being managed.