

To Whom It May Concern:

Joint Standing Committee for National Capital and External Territories
Inquiry into the Changing Economic Environment in the Indian Ocean Territories

Terms of reference:

1. To inquire into and report on the changing economic environment in the Indian Ocean Territories giving consideration to current arrangements, barriers to business development and future need with regard to:
 - a. communication services such as broadband internet, digital television and mobile telephony
From a school perspective broadband internet is simply inadequate. There is no opportunity to video conference as bandwidth is too small, and speed of internet often slow and cumbersome. In this current age of technology this should not be the situation, and worst students education and preparation for their futures is adversely affected. Internet to the islands is often described as "driving a Ford Cortina through a straw". Further at the end of this year, the island will be left without an internet technician, a situation that will cause immeasurable issues.
 - b. transport services and costs including passenger and freight transport
*The Sky Air World scenario was obviously a debacle but more importantly left people on the island wondering about access to appropriate passenger transport. Further, little or no regard seems to be given to island interests in terms of air flights, specifically with reference to flights moving from a Thursday to a Friday. Despite on-going feedback flights have steadfastly remained on Fridays (and largely it seems from a business point of view rather than serving the needs of the client). From a professional point of view this has now resulted in no professional contact with Christmas Island DHS, our closest neighbour, leaving staff here even further professionally isolated. Further, individuals now have to go to CI for 10 days rather than previously for four days for medical reasons, necessitating greater time off work and cover as well as having significant personal family issues.
Costs: A full fare of approx \$2300 is quite unbelievable. NJS have stated that fares will be more flexible from April – let's hope so. Flying off the island for professional reasons, and more importantly private reasons is prohibitively expensive and adds considerable stress to health and well being.
Freight transport is simply inadequate. This year the first ship arrived January 14, the second ship arrived March 21 - four weeks late, causing significant hardship to school staff, in particular staff new to the islands this year. One family have waited over three months for their 'dietary' food. Last year was even worse with six months between ships. There appears to be no accountability once again causing significant professional and personal hardships.*
 - c. Commonwealth Government services and programs
 - d. the operation of businesses in the region
 - e. cost and availability of housing
c, d and e: for the past two years the island has been without an electrician. We have a plumber on the island but only because he is the husband of a teacher. Once again despite on-going requests to Commonwealth no provision has been made to ensure the island has enough tradesmen for the island to function. Government business units were left to their own devices, a situation that not only took enormous time away from core business to sort out but as a school ultimately a situation we were the least equipped to deal with.

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