

**COCOS CONNGRESS-INC COCOS (KEELING) ISLANDS
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Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories inquiry into the changing economic environment in the Indian Ocean Territories.

From: Cocos Congress Home Island Cocos (Keeling) islands

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The Cocos Congress was formed following to a meeting of Cocos Malay people on Home in March of 1995. This meeting was convened to consider the problem of the lack of provision for the expression of the Cocos Malay views about developments and plans for the future of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

Congress Aim

The aim of the Cocos Congress is to nurture and protect the interest of the Cocos Malay of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands

Congress Objective

The objectives of the Cocos Congress are to:

1. Provide a forum for the formation and expression of the views and wishes of the Cocos Malay residents of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.
2. Provide a voice for the expression of the interests of the Cocos Malay residents of the Cocos Island.
3. Gain a more substantial place for the Cocos Malay people in the administration and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands
4. Develop a long term, but evolving plan meeting the needs of the residents of the Cocos (Keeling) islands.

We would like to raise the following to the Joint Standing Committee attention.

The Home island Cocos Malay community recognises that the unemployment is the significant issue facing our community and the consequences of generational unemployed may well result in our community loosing its cultural identity.

The formation of the Economic Development Consultative Group for the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and the employment of the Economic Development Officer are positive moves by the Government to help with economic development.

We believe that there should be greater employment opportunities which come from the many contracts and building jobs that occur on Cocos and think that longer term planning which creates awareness in the community of what is being planned for future works will allow us to have appropriately trained people ready for this work.

It appears that on many occasions the community is not included in the discussions about what and who is undertaking work.

There could be a register of skills for all of the un and under employed which could be utilised in a job search program for people who are looking for workers. We see many workers coming from the main land of Australia and doing work which local people could be doing. This appears to occur as there is no one who is actively working with the unemployed and the developers or contractors.

We recognize that there is a need for our community to be more proactive but find that without being aware of what is happening by the time it does happen we have been too late.

There would appear to be opportunities for greater traineeships which again could be managed and promoted if people were aware of the longer term opportunities and could see careers being developed into the future.

There are a number of small businesses who are willing to develop but find it difficult as there is no location for them to set up, limited access to finance to set up and then inability to have insurance cover.

We have been appreciative of the current program of business workshops and training which is being provided by the Attorney –General's Department in conjunction with the Small Businesses Development Corporation but believe that there is the need for building or locations for them to set up along with financial assistance to establish.

May like to have a look at the Indigenous Business Australia program IBA this could be a similar model for Cocos.

IBA Enterprises works with Indigenous Australians to assist them to succeed in businesses. IBA Enterprise assists eligible Indigenous Australians to establish, acquire and grow small to medium businesses, through business loans and business support services. The business support services include business planning, business-related skills development and mentoring.

The program is geared towards assisting Indigenous Australians to succeed in business and to bridge the gap to private sector funding. It is fundamental to achieving these outcomes that the business proposal demonstrates commercial viability.

In addition, IBA Enterprises undertakes selected economic development initiatives, designed to assist Indigenous Australians to build capacity and aspiration for enterprise.

The cultural aspects of our community are unique and should be valued and shared with others and we believe that there should be assistance provided to ensure that cultural awareness is supported through training programs for our community and others. Tourism could well play a role in this and we recognise the need to work closely with the tourism industry and the airlines that bring people here.

With an aging population and some Cocos-Malays now choosing to return to Cocos for retirement from the mainland we think this is another area where the economy can progress but there needs to be supported in our efforts to make Cocos a lifestyle choice for them.

Increases to accommodation and infrastructure and retaining services are keys to our ability to increase or maintain our population.

Communication is a key to many of the issues and how can we have local people replace people who leave or retire. This includes areas such as teachers and nurses if there was a greater awareness of what the future holds then many of our local young people could be taking on these roles.

The community fully support non Cocos island people to come and develop business on Cocos such as the tourism industry, coconut, aquaculture and agriculture so that locals can be employed. We are happy to open the islands up to anyone to help us with our economy.

We look forward to the outcomes from the inquiry and we are willing to be active in helping to resolve our problem.

There is we believe a good opportunity for utilising our skills in the coconut industry which may initially be small businesses such as soap making, coconut milk, shampoo and using shells and husk. Cocos was built around the coconut industry and we could be progressing this in the future.

End of Statement.