

As the General Manager of the largest employer on Cocos,(Cocos Islands Co-Operative Society Limited) and an attendee of the public hearing on Home Island September 29 2009, I wish to make the following observations regarding the points of reference.

#### Communications

As explained and highlighted by submissions, the existing internet service is barely adequate, with its continuing service in doubt, beyond the end of November this year.

I think it was demonstrated that an efficient and reliable Internet service is vital to both the social and economic fabric of the islands.

Mobile phone coverage on Home Island has not operated since November 2008 and is only an intermittent service on West Island.

Digital television is the way of the future for all Australian citizens and I hope the residents of the Indian Ocean Territories can benefit from this improved technology.

Australia Post – the lack of service from Australia Post astounds me. The following mission statement has been taken from their website

*“Australia Post is committed to providing high quality mail and parcel services to all Australians.”*

Inward Mail – Mainland suppliers or individuals need to forward goods or mail by Express Post at a cost of \$11.30 for items up to 3 kilograms. Australia Post only deliver to the Perth Airport 2 days a week – this can mean it can still take in excess a week for receipt – that is if there is room on the plane – quite frequently there is not and it is delayed even further. So much for “Express Post”.

Outward Mail – The local postmaster in order to encourage sales of Express Post satchels (which he receives a commission on such sales), will hold all mail other than Express Post satchels and standard

envelopes for up to 3 weeks before packing for the plane. This can mean a delay of up to 4 weeks before receipt.

How can this be acceptable – we are still part of Australia?

## Transport Services

### Air Services

Freight – the freight rate of \$4.60 for fresh fruit and vegetables was increased without any notice to the community – in fact we were notified 10 days after the increase was effected. For the Co-Operative, this increase created an additional financial impost of \$70,000 per annum, which of course has been passed on to the consumer.

Passenger services – the former service of 2 weekly flights has now been increased to 3 flights per week. Whilst we welcome this extra flight, it has done little to the expected flow of increased tourism numbers. The IOT's are going through an unusual phenomenon with high contractor numbers on the Rumah Baru project and increase of service personnel to Christmas Island catering the refugee issue.

It is difficult to quantify the 'lost business' because when a potential tourist enquires about seat availability, at the travel agent, only to be told nothing is available, obviously they will travel elsewhere. These 'burn off's are not recorded or counted in any sort of statistics.

### Shipping Services

The shipping and subsequent stevedoring service (conducted by the Co-Operative) on Cocos, must be the most expensive in the world. Loose cargo brought from Perth landed on Cocos at a cost \$445 per cubic metre.

We acknowledge that the construction of a new freight facility at Rumah Baru on West Island will increase efficiencies and hopefully a reduction of prices.

It is wrong for the Commonwealth government to merely state 'it is a private service beyond our control'. The Commonwealth Government is either directly or indirectly is the largest importer of goods to the islands by far. Importer? I thought we still lived in Australia.

This alone is a very good reason to become involved by way of shipping by way of Service Delivery Agreement with a shipping company to ensure:

- Value for money – maximising taxpayer's dollars
- A consistent and reliable service
- Some accountability as regard to prices

At the Cocos hearing and the various submissions, it was emphasised that a reasonably priced and reliable service is essential for the residents of Cocos in day to day living along with the provision of services required for the emerging tourism trade. The following voyages in:

Year	No. of Voyages
2007	9
2008	6
2009	7

indicates a unreliable service with all of us suffering.

#### Commonwealth Government services and programs

The Commonwealth Government provides services with Western Australian government departments, in the main, with the system from an outsider's point of view seeming to function fairly well.

It is an surely a concern that IOT residents are enrolled in a Federal electorate in Northern Territory, our laws and regulations are almost solely based on West Australian state government (in which we now say) standards.

## Operations of businesses in the region

The required amount of bureaucracy and red tape required to operate businesses seem to be out of step. There are many instances of mainland standards being applied to operations in the IOT's not clearly not relevant or necessary

There were comments regarding the conduct of Fisheries WA and their jurisdiction on Cocos. Another example is they have placed bag limits of various fish caught on Cocos, with no enforcement available.

## Cost and availability of housing

I consider that a major impediment to a new business commencing or expansion of an existing business is the lack of housing. In 2004 the Commonwealth released a number of blocks in Buffet Close on West Island. This land was previously Crown Land. Of the 18 blocks released 5 were not sold and remain vacant. Some of the blocks sold were snapped up by interstate and overseas investors. Upon making enquiries persistently over the past 3 years, as to the fate of the unsold blocks, I receive the response that they will be released soon. How soon is soon. I am aware the GHD on behalf of the Commonwealth Government has recently undertaken a study on the future uses of Crown Land on West Island, and these blocks and a logical extension have been earmarked for development. Let us hope that expediency can prevail.

There is also the issue of until very recently the unoccupied housing at the West Island Quarantine Station. Local business has been imploring the government to allow local business access to the se houses and facilities, only to be met with stubborn resistance. The moment a private contractor (Wylie & Skene at Rumah Baru) requires help in accommodation, access is granted. As the Co-Operative operates the only motel on Cocos (28 rooms) it would have been advantageous to have at least some of the contractors stay with us.