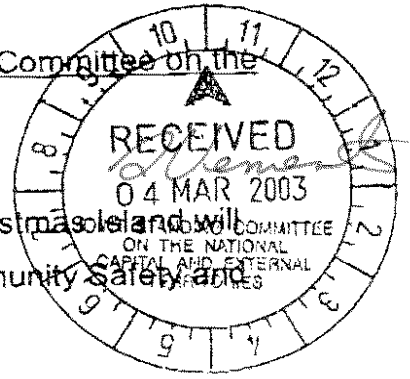


Statement from several Christmas Island residents to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories.



We understand that the Committee's March 2003 review and visit to Christmas Island will include consideration of Environment and Land Management, and Community Safety and Community Care.

1. We would like to make the following comments in relation to Environment and Land Management during the recently-mothballed Immigration Reception and Processing Centre (IRPC) development.

We are aware that the development was exempt from the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBCA), and understand that its exemption was specifically on the grounds of the 'high-priority' nature of the project. Usual environmental impact assessment procedures were bypassed. We would like clarification on the following points:

- Which agency now has responsibility for monitoring environmental impacts of the land clearing on the proposed IRPC site and the related housing development in Poon Saan/Silver City? This is of particular concern in the residential area, given the erosion during recent heavy rains.
- Now that the IRPC project has a 'less-urgent timeline' (Ministerial press release 009/2003, 19 Feb), what is the status of the EPBCA? Will it be reinstated, and will due process be followed during the re-tender and revised development of the project?
- When/if the EPBCA is reinstated, what, if any, reparations can be made under the Act for environmental damage sustained during the 'high-priority' project?

We would also be interested to know when the costs-to-date for the IRPC – including those associated with the cancellation of the present contract - will be made public, and how much of those costs could have been saved if the project had run to a normal timeline. We believe that this information will enable islanders to make better cases for community-based project-funding in comparison, and will allow some more accurate perspective on government priorities and interests in respect of overall funding for the island.

2. As an adjunct to these comments and in line with the Committee's brief to review community safety and community care issues, we would make the following comments.

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The Island has, over the last eighteen months, become a *de facto* military base during periods of shore-leave and changeover from the ships off-shore. We would like to put on record our distress at

- the presence of armed troops undergoing training exercises at the Cove (the most public and easily accessible beach on the island, located in a residential area);
- the orders not to photograph (what legislation governs permission to take photos in public areas? If the actions of the troops are 'secret', then why train in full public view?);
- the lack of PR on behalf of the military (*The Islander* newsletter could be a forum for introducing and explaining the presence of the on-island troops in general terms);
- the need to explain to the island's children why all these people in uniform are here ('are we at war Mum? What are they doing here?').

In conjunction with our anxiety and distress at the lack of information about the well-being of the (invisible and voiceless) asylum-seekers on-island, this has been a most stressful time for us all.

We would be happy to speak further about these matters with the Committee during its visit to the Island.

(Signed)

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