

**Submission to the Inquiry into the changing economic environment in the
Indian Ocean Territories**
by Dee Margetts and Nic Dunlop

My partner and I have owned a property on Christmas Island since about 1996 (when I was a member of the Federal Senate) to rent out as well as give ourselves and our friends the opportunity of spending more time in the future on this amazing island. Nic, who had worked as an environmental officer with Christmas Island Phosphates for a few years in the 1980s and, as a very experienced and well published biologist, is very familiar with the island's natural resources and ecosystem. He is also one of the scientists who helped create Christmas Island Bird Week over the last few years (and the very successful Indian Ocean Seabird Conference in April 2008).

The economic future of Christmas Island should be seen in terms of its sustainable resources. It has been acknowledged for many years that the future of phosphate mining on the island is limited. But very little has been done over time by the Federal Government to help the island convert to a more sustainable economic future. The island itself is its greatest and most valuable resource.

I worked for Qantas for 6 years back in the 1970s, and my experience in the travel industry is that if you want to promote tourism you need to make sure that:

- a) the air travel providers are secure for at least 2 years in advance, and
- b) that group tours and packages are promoted widely at the very least amongst the travel industry in Western Australia (and beyond that, to other states and other countries via the internet).

There are, I believe, many travel agents and tour operators in Western Australia who are not even aware that air travel to Christmas Island is publicly accessible. When I worked in the travel industry, group bookings for tours were generally made around 2 years in advance in order to organise tour leadership and appropriate accommodation, effectively advertise by means of events, leaflets, the internet etc. This requires proper industry promotion but that promotion **REQUIRES** as much air travel security as possible.

Things have become so insecure with regard to air travel lately to Christmas Island that it may mean that events such as Christmas Island Bird Week (in September) may not have the numbers it needs, even though everybody who has participated in it in the past has thoroughly enjoyed it.

Extending phosphate mining by destroying more primary rainforest habitat in this amazing and unique environment does not help the transition to a more sustainable economy on Christmas Island – it actually has almost the opposite effect.

Another major issue which needs to be addressed is the lack of property management on the island. A few years ago there were two property managers on the island competing with each other. As I understand it, from a community perspective, there are currently **no** licensed property managers on the island. It would, in my view make a big difference for the island's future if the Territories Minister, in conjunction with the Christmas Island Shire could make sure such a licensed property management option is available to island property owners, so that those people who wish to work on the island or spend more than just a few days there have a range of self sufficient

accommodation options. If that was possible, it may be useful for some more properties to be given short-term tourist status, as long as they meet certain standards.

I would be happy to talk to the committee if you wish me to. Thanks.

Dee Margetts

Below are some comments from my partner, Dr JN (Nic) Dunlop:

Points for Christmas Island Economic Future Enquiry

The Federal Government has ruined years of work by the Christmas Island Tourism Association (CITA) in developing tourism market for CI by building the detention centre (which used up all the tourism capacity) and in its management of air-links.

There is no future for Christmas Island in mining as it will destroy the islands major asset, its environment. Current operations continue to negate tourism because operations produce constant dust emissions (making everything grubby), anti-social and dangerous road haulage and the evidence that islands asset (its environment) is constantly being degraded.

The future economy of CI needs to utilise its unique terrestrial and marine environment and its proximity to South-east Asian markets for services.

These include:

- Health services – e.g. using the islands relative good health facilities for ‘export’ elective surgery and other treatments not readily available in Indonesia.
- Education services, e.g. an international high school, tertiary training campus (extension of an existing Australian University) specialising in natural resource management, national parks management for foreign students from the region.
- An international scientific research station - focussing on island ecology and marine climate change science.

The development of tourism will ultimately depend on stable and competitively priced air transport services and the development of on island products, capacity (business development) and infrastructure.

The new amenities centre is an excellent small conference venue (recently used for the Indian Ocean Seabird Conference) and conference tourism needs to be promoted. Infra-structure and tourism products need to be developed to tap into the burgeoning cruise-ship market.

Nic Dunlop