

To the Hon Jim Lloyd MP, Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, the CGC, and others concerned with maintaining stable community and sustainable governance arrangements on Norfolk Island,

This letter represents acknowledgement of having received your recent letter (dated 27 April 2006) sent to all "householders" or post office box holders here on Norfolk Island. It is now a month since I wrote to you and the Commonwealth Grants Commission (CGC) with my personal submission concerning Australian Government proposed changes for Norfolk Island. As yet, I have not received acknowledgement or response to my submission from your Ministerial office or the CGC. (Copy enclosed again for yourself and CGC.) In the meantime I have been compiling research on governance and finance models used to help sustain other small island states. Please find attached a two-page spreadsheet that provides summary data for other "comparable community" models that your office, the CGC, Treasury and Department of Finance might find useful to consider before final cabinet decisions are made concerning Norfolk Island's future.

Norfolk Island is a truly oceanic island, with distinctive cultural and historical heritage, that separates it markedly from Australian mainland developments. I have therefore sought to include data from other remotely located and small island communities to identify how they manage to "sink or swim". Norfolk Island has certainly managed to sustain itself since 1979, even quite favourably when compared with some small island states detailed in the attached spreadsheet. This has been achieved in no small part due to Norfolk Island's tight control of immigration, customs and quarantine. In fact, Norfolk Island's current immigration regime is even more strict and demanding than current procedures for entry to the Australian mainland. So I was a little surprised that your recent letter quoted concerns for securing better Australian border control as a reason for unilaterally revoking immigration, customs and quarantine powers from Norfolk Island Government. Perhaps you could be more explicit in detailing for the Norfolk Island community how removing their current stricter immigration controls will increase Australian mainland border security arrangements. Also, are you able to give any guarantees as to whether Norfolk Island Government and community representatives will be included in future immigration policy and decision-making bodies that will have direct impacts on the island?

When comparing small island states, it is interesting to note that Norfolk Islanders have been delivering their own full range of government services without "foreign aid", without reliance on domestic Australian financial "aid", and without benefit of control or revenues from the island's own territorial waters. It is also interesting to note significant gaps in data on the spreadsheet, especially concerning GDP (both in terms of purchasing power parity as well as per capita). It would have been good to have had authoritative statistics and comparisons over time, as well as with other small island states, so that current claims and concerns about economic "downturn" might be looked at using comprehensive rather than partial or opinion-based information. Outcomes of CGC and ABS fact-finding missions might help to provide clearer and agreed understandings of the size and strengths (as well as weaknesses) of the island economy, to provide common ground and a baseline for future comparisons. A more inclusive approach that allowed Norfolk Island community and government "ownership" and formal roles in collection and management of the information may have yielded even higher response rates and less reliance on averages and estimates that you will now be relying on.

You mention in your letter the possible need for legal aid / assistance with prosecution of future court cases, but fail to identify the real and present difficulty that the island faces in recruiting and staffing legal positions to provide sound advice for government decision-making. It is my understanding that various Australian Government departments maintain formal secondment and staff exchange arrangements with countries such as Japan and New Zealand. Would you consider offering and co-funding staff secondments and exchange arrangements between the Australian and Norfolk Island Governments, as a constructive way of supporting sustainable governance arrangements on Norfolk Island? Norfolk Island officers would also benefit from experience through staff exchanges with mainstream mainland public service agencies.

On a personal note, Norfolk Islanders have expressed to me their dismay at how community celebrations of this sesquicentennial year have been marred and overtaken by having to contend with political pressures and concerns. The need for thorough and constructive political discussions between the Australian and Norfolk Island Governments seems obvious, but sadly appears not to be occurring. Meanwhile, I look forward to receiving a response from you or your office and the CGC on the suggestions and issues I have raised, in this and my previous letter, that are of concern to myself and other members of the Norfolk Island community.

Yours sincerely,

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