



## From the desk of the Chief Minister

We live in an environment of constant challenge and opportunity, and the last few weeks have illustrated this. In thinking about what I wanted to say in this month's informal column, what came to mind was: Let's get into it! Many exciting new opportunities lie before us, and it's been great to see our community rise to the challenge. At the same time, the Norfolk Island Government has action happening on a whole range of fronts, so I'd like to share with you just a few of the things that are on the go.

Anyone who watches television, listens to radio or reads the news on the web could not have missed the Australian election campaign, or the resulting change of Commonwealth Government last weekend. The new Commonwealth Ministry will be sworn in on Monday, and I have let the Assembly Members know that that I want us to approach the new Australian Government on the front foot. We are prepared from day one to provide briefings for the Prime Minister and the portfolio ministers with responsibility for relevant areas such as territories, tourism and environment. As soon as the Ministers take office, I will be inviting them to visit Norfolk Island to consult with our government and the community on a wide range of areas. I am confident that we can move forward in cooperation with the Rudd Labor Government to achieve mutually agreed outcomes for the benefit of all Norfolk Islanders.

This time of year sees a range of events marking significant milestones. The Year 12 formal was a great occasion, and I personally wish all of our Year 12 graduates success as they move on to new stages of their lives in study or work. Following on from that event, next week will see the Year 10 farewell. It has been great to see the role the students have played in organising these events and showing leadership in the standards set. For example, I understand that Year 10 have decided that for themselves and all guests, the farewell will be free of alcohol and tobacco, and I encourage everyone in the community to respect this responsible choice.

In the last month I was able to attend the 19<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Seminar that was focused specifically on "Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy". This proved to be an opportunity to expand my knowledge of Parliamentary processes used throughout the commonwealth. Aside from covering the parliament and committees system, I was able to participate with other parliamentarians as we focused on issues relating to ethics, transparency, accountability, the executive and the public service and the right to information. Some thirty five members from diverse regions discussed their methods, concerns and commitment to pursuing the best outcomes for their areas, the seminars were in many cases a launch pad for each of us to form links that were rooted in challenges of a similar nature and emerge better informed and with some form of support network. As well as chairing one of the seminars, I was able to provide information on Norfolk Island, our many attractions, our governance and our goals.

Once the parliamentary seminar finished, I boarded a plane bound for the Isle of Man, to further advance our connection with both the parliament and the people. Our Fletcher Christian hailed from the Isle as did Captain Bligh, so Norfolk's historical links formed one facet of my visit. One aspect of my visit to Isle of Man was to investigate the financial services component of their revenue system, and to restart discussions on Norfolk's potential in that field, another aspect was to pursue information on the operating agreements used by the Isle of Man to fund its initial harbour facilities. While on the Isle of Man I was able to be

part of the “House of Keys” Parliament sitting, and able to discuss many issues with a wide range of ministers and establish a link with the membership and form a friendship that Norfolk can benefit from. I am very grateful to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association for underwriting the cost of my visit to the United Kingdom.

I am greatly impressed by the volume and quality of feedback I receive as Chief Minister on the plans and actions of the government. The recent Open Day at Rawson Hall produced lots of useful discussion and sensible suggestions on the way forward from a range of people, both locals and visitors. Since its tabling, I have received much thoughtful comment on the draft strategic plan, with many ideas that will be incorporated into the final plan. One of the great things about living in our small, vibrant community is that many people are willing to think in depth about the important issues which we face and make positive suggestions for progress.

There have been lots of reports in recent times about the pressures being faced by Pacific states due to the rapid increase in the world price of oil. For example, a recent United Nations report said that “...to meet this challenge, countries in the Asia-Pacific region cannot continue under the ‘business as usual’ scenario. Governments should adopt an approach that uses more renewable resources and energy-efficient technologies and practices”. Hafiz Pasha, U.N. Assistant Secretary-General, said that “...the Asia-Pacific region has had to pay 400 billion dollars as an additional oil bill to what was spent in 2003. “This is twenty times the annual aid flow to the region.”

Here in Norfolk, we are actively involved in developing options for renewable energy, with several very promising initiatives for cleaner, greener and less expensive energy in the spotlight. I have had a number of discussions with companies and individuals on the technical details of the options for power generation and implementation strategies. I expect to travel to the mainland very early in 2008 to progress these discussions. The conditions of the consultancy for a new harbour include a requirement to consider generation of electricity by wave or tidal action. As well, the manager of the power station is investigating the possibilities of two-way electricity meters, so that consumers could sell back into the power grid any excess power generated by the BP Solar methods which might attract Commonwealth subsidies. For our own future, and the future of the planet, it is critical that we move forward quickly on renewable energy. It is encouraging that the incoming Commonwealth Government includes a Minister for Climate Change. We will work as closely as possible with the new Minister to develop and implement green energy for Norfolk Island.

Every week, I receive detailed figures from Customs and Immigration on population trends and the numbers of people ordinarily resident in the island. The underlying trend continues to rise steadily, with noticeable growth over the past year in numbers of residents and Temporary Entry Permit holders. As well, relatively large numbers of advertisements for employment vacancies indicate that there is a shortage of labour in Norfolk Island, especially in the industries supporting our tourist industry. We have recently announced an initiative to provide more TAFE training free of charge for young and not-so-young locals to help meet this demand and to provide opportunities for our people to stay in their chosen community. We are also preparing a commerce policy aimed at attracting new businesses, and the nearly completed reviews of immigration and population policies will help us to set strategies to achieve sustainable population growth in areas which will diversify our economy and promote employment.

I have noticed lately while walking the island that there seems to be a growing volume of litter on our roads and reserves, especially bottles and cans from alcoholic drinks. Like me, many of our dedicated walkers and cyclists carry a bag and pick up some of this litter, and I thank them for their efforts. As well the annual “Clean up Norfolk Day” in December will see much rubbish removed from our roads and public places. This is an excellent initiative, and I commend everyone involved. Part of the joy of living in Norfolk Island is the relatively pristine environment and the lack of litter. I hope that we can all unite to make every day a “Clean up

Norfolk" day – please help by not littering our beautiful island with items thrown from cars or carelessly dropped. This is a simple matter on which we can all make a difference.

Whether it is economic growth, renewable energy, community events or just keeping our island clean, let's get into it!

André Nobbs  
**Chief Minister**

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